

Rehearsing Beginning. The education of art educators as an occasion for study

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Abstract

In this article I propose to study the education of art educators through the lens of beginning –beginning not as something one does once, but as constitutive of a teacher’s practice. Similar to how an artist works in a process-based manner, teaching is an embodied practice developed through repetition, which allows one to shape an individual way of being and doing things. My aim is to develop a language that emphasises a common ground for both art and education, revolving around both being an open-ended process. Investigating the concept of beginning in a practice-based manner, I want to show how art education can become what Freire calls a cognisable object, allowing students to become student-teachers and teachers to become teacher-students, who take turns in testing out new practices.

Keywords: Beginning, Art education, Art educators, Education, Freire.

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Ensaaiando o começar. A educação dos educadores de arte como uma ocasião para o estudo

Resumo

Neste artigo proponho estudar a formação dos educadores de arte através da lente do começar – começar não como algo que se faz uma vez, mas como constitutivo da prática de um professor. Semelhante à forma como um artista trabalha de uma maneira baseada em processos, o ensino é uma prática incorporada desenvolvida através da repetição, que permite moldar uma maneira individual de ser e fazer as coisas. O meu objetivo é desenvolver uma linguagem que enfatize um terreno comum para a arte e a educação, girando em torno de ambos enquanto um processo aberto. Investigando o conceito de começar de um modo baseado na prática, quero mostrar como a educação artística se pode tornar o que Freire chama de objeto cognoscível, permitindo que os alunos se tornem alunos-professores e os professores se tornem professores-alunos, revezando-se assim no teste de novas práticas.

Palavras-chave: Começar, Educação artística, Educadores de arte, Educação, Freire.

Essayer le commencer. L'éducation des éducateurs d'art comme une occasion d'étudier

Résumé

Dans cet article, je propose d'étudier la formation des éducateurs d'art à travers la lentille du commencer – commencer non pas comme quelque chose que l'on fait une fois, mais comme constitutif de la pratique d'un enseignant. Semblable à la façon dont un artiste travaille d'une manière basée sur les processus, l'enseignement est une pratique incorporée développée par la répétition, qui permet de façonner une manière individuelle d'être et de faire les choses. Mon objectif est de développer un langage qui met l'accent sur un terrain d'entente pour l'art et l'éducation, tournant autour des deux en tant que processus ouvert. En étudiant le concept de commencer d'une manière basée sur la pratique, je veux montrer comment l'éducation artistique peut devenir ce que Freire appelle un objet connaissable, permettant aux étudiants de devenir élèves-enseignants et aux enseignants de devenir enseignants-élèves, à tour de rôle dans le test de nouvelles pratiques.

Mots clés: Commencer, Éducation artistique, Éducateurs d'art, Éducation, Freire.

Prologue

There is nothing really that can prepare you for the first time you stand in front of a classroom all by yourself. The experience is a highly visceral one. Before anything else, you feel the energy of the group. Only in retrospect, perhaps in conversation with a host teacher or a peer, you can begin to understand what happened in that moment. Depending on your own dispositions and expectations, the experience can be daunting, but also highly affirmative. Corporal gestures, such as mutual gazes and positioning oneself in space and body language, establish a relationship before saying a single word.

As a teacher, in a classroom, you have always already taken a position vis-à-vis the group. As a beginning teacher, taking position can be an expression of tacit knowledge built up over the many years that you've witnessed teachers teaching. Standing in front of a group for the first time can activate an implicit belief of what a teacher does or should do. This moment can be affirmative, as it can feel like stepping into a role that has been assigned to you. But only then, of course, the work begins, as reality never conforms to your expectations.

Aim of this article

The main aim of this article is to show how this experience of beginning extends far beyond the first time of doing something. Each class can be seen as a beginning, in the sense of taking position in a situation that has the potential for unexpected outcomes. To be an educator means to begin and to foster beginnings, for yourself and for others – the difference being that over time you develop ways to direct your own expectations.

Much of this text has its roots in collective efforts, undertaken with colleagues at the Art and Design Teacher Training Programme at Willem de Kooning Academy and the Master Education in Arts at Piet Zwart Institute, both in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Both are programmes where students are guided in this process of beginning – meaning both the pedagogical and artistic dimensions of beginning an art educational practice.

As an artist and educator, working as a teacher trainer, I am interested in developing an ethos that underpins my work in both domains. This has an obvious personal dimension, cultivating a sense of continuity when working between different contexts that are marked by their own concerns and habits. More substantial, however, is the assumption that through developing concepts that work across disciplines, chances

emerge to approach art education as a space that truly embraces the open-endedness of artistic and pedagogical endeavours alike. Much of my work evolves around testing this assumption in practice, in the context of the institutions mentioned above. My aim is not to render things the same. Teaching need not be art and art need not be pedagogical. Yet, I do believe a thinking beyond disciplines starts within art education itself, with questions such as: what can I, as an educator, learn from artistic practices? And: what can I, as an artist, learn from being in a school?

This text is also the result of working in what I believe to be a productive tension between the open-endedness of art making and learning on the one hand, and the tendency to formalise education in terms of concrete outcomes on the other. We train students for a highly specialised profession that requires a specific set of skills. Gert Biesta (2013) calls this the qualification function of education (p. 4). This clearly defined outcome informs many decisions regarding the design of courses. This is necessary, yet it conflicts with thinking in terms of a principally unknowable outcome.

In the Netherlands, teacher training in art and design is directed towards developing so-called *startbekwaamheid*, an ability to start. This is shorthand to refer to a set of knowledge and skills, defined on a national level, deemed necessary to become a professional educator, i.e. someone who knows how to act efficiently and adequately as a teacher. This set of knowledge and skills is the framework that teacher training programmes must follow. The notion of *startbekwaamheid* acknowledges that developing a teaching practice is a process of years. Therefore, besides artistic and pedagogic abilities, programmes are tasked with training 'an ability to reflect critically'.

This 'meta-ability' is usually interpreted as the ability to observe one's own behaviour in a professional situation where a problem occurs, and knowing how to independently acquire the skills needed to deal with the situation. In that sense, paradoxically, the notion of *startbekwaamheid* does seem to assume the possibility of a fully developed proficiency, namely in terms of a quantifiable amount of self-control and self-directedness. All in all, there is an economic, instrumentalised dimension to the learning outcomes described by these abilities, or 'competencies'. I propose a sideways move, away from an ability to start towards a rehearsal of beginning – not as something to overcome, but as constitutive of any teaching practice.

I believe this emphasis on beginning opens the possibility to think beyond pre-defined notions of professionalism that focus on efficiency. For instance, it can be about embracing a moment of not knowing what the right response is. In *The Undercommons*, Stefano Harney discusses the possibility of a moment "[...] where your pre-maturity, your immaturity, your not-being-ready, is also kind of an openness to being affected by others [...]" (Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 116). For an educator, the

challenge is to make this type of openness into an affirmative moment, for yourself and for your students.

My aim is not to conceptualise a space outside of formal education, but rather to validate moments that can exist within it. I don't think I can resolve the tensions inherent in an education that is shaped by formalised learning outcomes, and most certainly I cannot do this on my own. My aim with this article is to make a few proposals towards conceptualising teaching art as a continuous beginning, and how it works in practice.

Context

In the Netherlands, most teacher training programmes in art and design are hosted by art academies. Unlike many other countries, teacher training in the arts is a four-year course on bachelor level, in principle also open to students without prior formal higher education in visual arts or design, provided they pass the entry exam².

Fine Art and Design Teacher Training is traditionally modelled on courses in Fine Arts studio practice. Its core values, such as its equal appreciation of process and outcome, and its equal attention for materials and concepts, are shared with other courses in higher art education. In the past, didactics and pedagogy were offered as supplementary courses to core subjects focusing on art practice. Over the past decade the aim of teacher training has shifted towards integrating the pedagogical and the artistic. Yet there are as many ways of doing this as there are educators, so teaching methods usually allow ample space for developing individual, experimental approaches to connecting art and education.

In general, teacher training programmes encourage their students to bring notions and values from contemporary art and design to non-specialised art education, for instance, during internships in secondary schools. However, many schools in the Netherlands that do not specialise in art tend to subscribe to other values, such as predictability of outcomes, neatness, and logistical efficiency. Even the art classes in secondary education might be built on values that feel outdated for those working in contemporary art, such as the privileging of individual expression over communication.

² This contrasts with the situation in countries where teacher training is a post-graduate programme for students who hold a degree in Fine Arts or Design. In The Netherlands, there is a two-year programme for artists and designers to become a teacher, but this is also a Bachelor course. The master programmes Education in Arts focus on practice development through research, rather than obtaining formal qualifications for teaching.

Or the approach can be quite technical, focusing, for instance, on drawing exercises without embedding these in a more expanded notion of craft or visual literacy.

Arguably, the question how to deal with the tensions – or even conflicts – that arise when attempts are made to allow these value systems to co-exist within schools is one of the most important topics in art educational discourse³. Many undergraduate and graduate students in Art Education are motivated by a belief in the value of experimentation and open-ended processes. Their internships and projects often pivot around creating a space for artistic-pedagogical work, quite literally in terms of physical space and space in the curriculum, as well as ideologically, aiming for a shift in mentality, by demonstrating what is *also* possible.

Teaching as an occasion for study

In this article, my aim is not to discuss concrete didactical strategies or alternative art educational programmes. My interest concerns the act of teaching itself, as, in the words of Stefano Harney, “an occasion for study” (Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 116). In education, learning usually designates a normative framework for qualifying and evaluating the changes an individual goes through, often derived from a pre-formulated outcome. For several authors, study is a strategy to challenge this desire to direct and restrict change. Tyson E. Lewis (2016) sees study as a state in which any expectations beyond the process itself are suspended. “Study is a state of educational being that could be thought of as neither ignorance nor mastery, neither proceeding toward a goal/end point nor simply stuck in perpetual sameness” (p. 349). When translated into an affirmative practice, such an understanding of study could nurture a practice evolving around experimentation.

Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013) see study as a concept that pivots around the social, rather than the individual dimension of change. Study is what you do together, it is about taking turns in proposing things to consider, texts to read, actions to take. Study is something that is always already going on, as the social life of the community of practitioners or students. It is the activity that risks being interrupted by the teacher’s call to order. When something becomes an occasion for study, the aim is not to simply replicate an existing practice or existing knowledge. Rather, to study means pushing something out-of-bounds, into your life.

³ In a Dutch context I am thinking of the work by educator-scholars such as Folkert Haanstra, whose work on “authentic art education” as an alternative to so-called ‘school art’ remains influential (Haanstra, 2001). A recent book building on the principles of authentic art education is ‘Wicked Arts Assignments’, edited by Emiel Heijnen and Melinda Bremmer (2021).

To study teaching as beginning encompasses both modalities of change: self-directed experimenting and the dynamic relation between a person and their social context.

School prepares beginning

If teaching is an infinite repetition of this moment of beginning, teaching a beginning art teacher means guiding them to a threshold. As their teachers we can do a lot, but in this moment of an encounter with a new group, it's between them and the group. In other words: we hopefully create space to study, but the learning that happens there remains beyond our control.

Undergraduate and graduate courses in education are highly self-reflexive programmes because of the structural similarity of the school and the workplace. While you are being educated to become a teacher, you learn about and experiment with education as a practice, as a discourse, and as an institutionalised domain of contemporary society. It is the medium, in the sense of the means to communicate something, as well as the object of study. I call this the recursive nature of courses in education. The consequence is that, almost as a matter of principle, the roles of teacher and student start to blur. The teacher of the future teacher is someone who Paulo Freire (1993) calls a *teacher-student*: "[...] no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach" (p. 80). Consequently, the student becomes a *student-teacher*.

The question how to begin implies the question of how to relate to what is there already. The educator has the possibility to instigate something new, with or against ideas, works and situations that it will replace or co-exist with. In "The Crisis in Education", Hannah Arendt (1961) roots this ability to start something new in one of the undeniable facts of life, namely that a human being is born into the world, as "something that has never been here before" (p. 189). By virtue of being a new beginning themselves, every human being is marked by 'natality', the possibility of beginning as a condition that frames every human life in the world.

It is not so much a choice whether to create something new. "To preserve the world against the mortality of its creators and inhabitants it must be constantly set right anew" (p. 192). The new generation learns about the world in order to use the newly acquired knowledge and skills as constructional elements to build a world. Something is passed on that is later changed. In that sense, education is an encounter with a world that is historical, but not necessarily held together by tradition. In

order to keep the transitional character of education intact, it must first protect the world against the drive of the new generation to recreate it. By doing so, education prepares for beginning. Arendt says:

Now school is by no means the world and must not pretend to be; it is rather the institution that we interpose between the private domain of home and the world in order to make the transition from the family to the world possible at all. (1961, p. 188)

The exciting insight developed by Arendt is that the acceptance of change is an expression of love for the world, precisely because to love the world means to acknowledge that without renewal it will fall into ruin. Despite its seemingly conservative tone, preserving what is there already appears as a function of beginning anew. Or, in Arendt's words, "[...] the essence of education is natality [...]" (p. 174).

Study begins with attention for the particular

If, following Arendt, teaching comprises offering the past as an object of study, how exactly does this work out for teaching art? Art has its history, its traditions, but equally ingrained in the field is a fondness of the new. Perhaps, as a discipline, art itself can be said to demonstrate a similar dynamic of preservation and renewal. The question I am interested in is: what does this mean for individual practitioners? And what does one teach, if one wants to demonstrate something of this dynamic, rather than reproduce a canonised form of art history?

Jan Verwoert (2008) argues that "[...] as artists, intellectuals and people who feel drawn to art and intellectual discourse, we are the heirs of modernism and therefore, by definition, lovers of history and lovers of the future" (p. 91). The things artists contribute to society are stories about the past and the future, he suggests. Two options arise: the story projects a generalised image of the past that makes a claim about what the future must become, thereby essentially colonising it. Or the story constitutes a moment in which a different future seems possible. He states that artists often feel drawn to something particular, such as an artwork, a figure from the margins of history, that speaks to one's own concerns. It is this focus on the particular that allows an individual to bypass the claims of grand narratives, such as canons.

Verwoert suggests building a personal canon of the particularities of the past that you allow yourself to be possessed by, which from the perspective of the institutionalised canon, can be called irreverence. Yet, he says: "Irreverent people are neither simply disbelievers nor disrespectful. They do not lack belief or respect as such. They

merely choose to not invest that belief and respect in what is generally regarded as credible and respectable – but instead dedicate it to something or someone else” (p. 95). It is this something else that opens the possibility of imagining a desired future.

What this positioning oneself in relation to the particularity of an object of study looks like in practice can be seen in Agnès Varda’s film *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* from 2000. The film explores the figure of the gleaner, a person who traditionally collects the leftover crops after the harvest, and the subject of a famous painting by Jean-François Millet from 1857. There is thus a historical dimension to the film, but gleaning still exists today, we learn, and Varda examines its social, political and legal dimensions through portraits of people who have a stake in it. This comprises people who still practice gleaning in a literal sense, out in the fields after harvest, but also others, whose livelihood depends on discarded goods and foodstuff.

Furthermore, Varda describes her own work as a filmmaker as gleaning, and her camera as a gleaning device. Yet, even though she metaphorically picks up that which is often overlooked, there is not a moment where the people she portrays are objectified. In Verwoert’s words, she chooses to dedicate her respect to someone else, simply because she’s interested in them. Something or someone is presented as valuable in their own right, beyond determination by the economic system that establishes and polices the distinction between merchandise and waste. But even the more reflective questions around who or what constitutes value are not allowed to overtake the portraits of people, who remain Varda’s principal interest. They are shown, simply because they matter.

Agnès Varda demonstrates how irreverence can be an ethical practice, through her incomparable attention to the particular. Even though the film is not *about* education in a literal sense, I use it in teaching to show what study can be. Through the figure of the gleaner, Varda exposes how self-directed attention works, building on the irreducible importance of the particular. For me, she inspires thinking about what a teacher can be.

Yet, it does not answer yet the question how to begin something. For that purpose, I want to introduce Edward W. Said’s concept of beginning.

How does a beginning materialise?

In his study *Beginnings*, Edward W. Said asks the question what it means to begin something for the writer, as well as the critic (Said, 1997). Each artistic or critical project is a beginning in so far as it raises anew the question how you relate to what

others have done and the context you work in. As a moment in a larger process, it represents both continuity and the possibility of something else. He is interested in this something else as “[...] production [that] claims a status alongside other works: it is *another work*” (Said, 1997, p. 13).

His notion of beginning is thus a nuanced one that moves beyond simple dichotomies such as old vs. new, or self vs. world. It is a moment that captures an intention, an effort informed by personal aims, yet directed towards an outside. “An intention [...] is a notion that includes everything that later develops out of it, no matter how eccentric the development or inconsistent the result” (Said, 1997, p. 12). As the materialisation of an intention, the beginning holds the complexity of your relation to others, as well as a characteristic way of articulating this. In that sense, a beginning is never a ground zero, but always “[...] already a project underway” (Said, 1997, p. 13). A project in which individual intention and indebtedness to others have equal weight.

Consequently, Said (1997) writes he “[...] consider[s] literature as an order of repetition, not of originality – but an eccentric order of repetition, not one of sameness” (p. 12). I would add that the same holds for visual arts, or even teaching. A beginning, which is to say, a project already underway, bypasses the duality of copy and original. Art is repetition precisely in its capacity to exist beyond a linear notion of development. It is eccentric in how it allows for idiosyncratic variation, while remaining attached to communal concerns. In other words: art allows for difference to come into being, while remaining a social phenomenon. To me, this seems a workable approach for education too.

My aim is not to offer a general theory of art, but to articulate a shared concern of ‘art’ and ‘education’ within art and design teacher training. The notions of beginning and repetition capture some characteristics of both art and education. Every artwork and every class can be seen as a beginning in how they allow an intention to begin to unfold. And each time, as an artist and as a teacher, you begin anew. Even when the conditions are the same (the materials you’ve worked with a dozen times before, in a classroom that you’ve inhabited for many years), you must be prepared for something unexpected. In other words: unless you actively coerce things into sameness, you instigate repetition, which is to say *another work*.

Rehearsing beginning

As I mentioned above, teaching art teachers is a highly self-reflexive practice, in which each class is both time and space to exchange ideas, as well as, potentially,

itself an object for critical scrutiny. I am interested in how formal structures such as a curriculum, but also informal situations facilitate beginnings, in the sense of materialising an intention. The formal and the informal are often intimately connected.

At the Master Education in Arts, as part of a formative assessment, we ask students to present their research in the form of a workshop for their peers and teachers. The aim is to bring the students' practices into the classroom. Being in the classroom as a student-teacher can feel quite vulnerable and it requires a great deal of mutual trust to make such a situation work. A student emailed me to express her concerns about the conflict she understandably felt when asked to take a risk at a moment that is also formally framed as an assessment. I replied to her:

[I hope] we can offer a space where the often-fragile beginnings of artistic and pedagogical work are nurtured and cultivated. Lizzie⁴ and I like to think of our classroom in terms of a space for the rehearsal of pedagogical encounters.

In retrospect, the brief correspondence made me wonder how often beginnings materialise in the margins of education. I'm not sure if this qualifies as teaching, but for sure meaningful exchanges happen along the edges of a class⁵. The impromptu conceptualisation 'rehearsal of pedagogical encounters' is another way of saying that the assignment was designed to practice beginning. The notion of rehearsal helps understanding beginning as a concrete activity.

Discussing the work of musicians, partly based on his own experiences as a cello player, Richard Sennett (2012) makes a useful distinction between practising and rehearsing: "[...] the one is a solitary experience, the other is collective" (p. 468). Practising is what you do by yourself, in a private space, to get all the notes right. Rehearsing is what follows, when you meet with others to prepare a performance. The aim of rehearsal is not to overcome or neutralise difference, but to create a layered interpretation of a piece, by allowing multiple voices to co-exist.

What interests me in particular is how Sennett conceptualises rehearsal as an essentially social activity. The rehearsal is the set of techniques that helps establishing a shared practice. The use of the word technique emphasises this is something that can be learned and cultivated. As Sennett says: "[...] cooperation is a form of craft" (p. 467). And, as Sennett explains, dialogue is a form of cooperation too. Rather than convincing others, it is about understanding oneself in relation to the other, while working on a communal project. This merging of technique and the social makes

4 My colleague Elizabeth Graham at the Master Education in Arts programme of Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam (NL).

5 Is there a demarcation criterion, to establish what is part of a class and what isn't?

Sennett's notion of rehearsal interesting for those who are developing a pedagogical practice. Thinking of cooperation as a set of techniques acknowledges that participation in the social life that is the core of every pedagogical situation is a skill that can be learned, precisely by paying close attention to those who think differently.

Creating space for student-led activities and workshops in the classroom of our Master Education in Arts is one attempt to rehearse education. Which means: to activate different perspectives on art education. A risk in teacher training and courses about education is a potential separation between the space for practising from the space for reflection. As a teacher trainer, one rarely has a chance to attend classes and projects organised by students, beyond one-off visits during internships. This is problematic, because, as I have tried to argue in the above, a practice of beginning is built through the particular.

Equally important, "real life" practice such as undertaking an internship has a performative dimension that can negatively affect a drive to experiment. As Arendt says, the school should not strive to coincide with the world. A supplementary space is needed to test ideas. The aim is not only the production of new artistic or didactic approaches. The "know-how" to be trained is the act of rehearsing, of testing as a way to cultivate a practice of beginning, to observe how new occasions for study emerge.

Rehearsing beginning: a case study

Micro-teaching is an established practice in teacher training that at least superficially aims at something similar to what I described in the previous paragraph. It usually involves giving a short version of a class to a group of peers, to evaluate the effectiveness of the class for the intended target group. Usually, the aim of micro-teaching is to establish an "approximation of practice" (Zhang & Lin, 2014, p. 97).

However, my interest lies elsewhere, in the question of how to transform the entire pedagogical situation into what Freire (1993) calls the cognisable object

that students and teacher gather around (p. 79). It allows for a shared exploration of a problem, for instance how to design process-based art education in a specific school setting. In other words, the aim is to create a distance within the pedagogical situation, in order to let it emerge as an occasion for study beyond the logic of institutional norms of effective behaviour. In this process, a student-teacher and a teacher-student take turns in temporarily directing attention through a case study, or exercise, that is relatable for all.

Thus, for a teacher-facilitator in this process, the pedagogical action consists in creating space to transform an art educational activity by students into a cognisable object that allows for study. I will now describe a concrete student-led activity to show how this works in practice⁶.

Jesse Greulich, our student-teacher for the coming hour, brings a heap of materials into our classroom at the academy: straps, linoleum, pink rope, a blue long-haired fabric, wooden cones, sheets of semi-transparent plastic, and many more. After a check-in exercise, standing together in a large circle, we are divided into two groups of seven and invited to pick a material. Then, standing in a smaller circle, the first person explains their choice of material, selects another person's material and connects the two. Then the person whose material was selected explains their choice and chooses another person's material and adds it to the emerging assemblage. And so on, until all materials are used.

Our student-teacher called the result a 'sculpture of stories', which is an accurate description. Through explaining a choice for a certain material, an inventory emerged of how one can relate to materials. For some of the experienced artists in the group these revolved around previous experiences working with the material. For others a material had triggered a more personal association or anecdote, or simply a desire to touch it. The simple, step-by-step connecting of materials made the whole experience into an exercise in creating sculptural form. An important insight that emerged was that one can do this without setting "making art" as an explicit aim. Sculptural form was assembled through narrative and simple manual actions.

In this exercise a true beginning emerged. As in all art making, there was nothing radically new to the elements in themselves. Making connections is a basic feature of manual and pedagogical work. For many participants the whole experience was highly gratifying, as it evoked a sense of pride, expressed afterwards by many participants, through an affirmative "we have made this".

⁶ Taken from two days of activities organised December 2021 by Master Education in Arts students. The activity was organised by Jesse Greulich and took an hour, including a reflective conversation afterwards.

Interestingly, it also demonstrated the complexity of a pedagogy of beginning. During a second round, participants were more consciously thinking about choices. Also, the second round was done with the entire group, rather than in two smaller groups. It led many to the conclusion that the very spontaneous first round was more effective.

My conclusion, however, would be that this is the characteristic difficulty of transforming the energy of a first time into a conscious strategy that has longevity. It is difficult to give direction and focus to a process, while keeping open the space for discovery that generated the energy inspiring the first phase of a new work. If an exercise yields positive energy, a conscious effort has to be made to avoid simply reproducing it. In that sense, the intention Said speaks about has to be reformulated each time anew, to keep this process in movement. Here the difference between repetition and reproduction becomes tangible. Yet, this is what beginning is about, both in an artistic sense, and as a pedagogical challenge. In the example, the literal repetition of an exercise exposes a more fundamental dimension of repetition as constitutive of art and education. The student-teacher facilitated a workshop on the workings of beginning, for themselves and for the group.

Rehearsal as a technique

Participants in this type of activity frequently state that seeing others at work is an enriching experience. This encompasses presented content and specific didactics, but also much more than that. The specificity of how others create a space for study can spark an awareness that everyone has a particular way of doing things, even if they feel their own actions are not yet adequate or effective. Everyone present has gone through the effort of designing something similar to the activity they're participating in. Perhaps this generates a very explicit awareness of the constructed nature of the situation. What exactly happens in this moment of observing others as part of studying education?

Observing other teachers at work is an indispensable part of studying teaching. As I mentioned above, I believe even a first time in front of a group of students can activate scripted behaviour, built up over years of observing your own teachers in primary and secondary education. This activity of observing continues in a more conscious, structured manner when studying education, both in class at the academy, and as part of internships or projects. However, seeing others doing things can never substitute trying things out for yourself. Each class is not an end product, but an object

of study: something to prepare, observe and repeat. Of course, teacher training is also about learning tricks to keep a group of teenagers silent during the explanation of an assignment. However, much of the work lies elsewhere. Each teacher has their own, idiosyncratic way of doing things and it is essential to find your own way.

Brazilian teacher trainers Karen Christine Rechia and Caroline Jacques Cubas (2019) discuss this way of doing things in terms of the gestural nature of teaching. Teacher training will always involve the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge, didactic skills and knowledge concerning social and psychological dimensions of the groups you work with. However, beyond these recognisable dimensions of teaching, there is a materiality of the trade itself that marks the body of the teacher and the space of teaching. For them, studying gestures is a constitutive part of being a teacher. It allows the beginning teacher to develop the craft of teaching, craft meaning what makes one behave in a way consistent with what he or she is (Rechia & Cubas, 2019, p. 118).

Rechia and Cubas refer to Vilém Flusser to explain what a gesture is: “a movement of the body or of a tool attached to the body for which there is no satisfactory causal explanation” (Flusser, 2014, p. 2). Gestures exist in a space between people, as the individual expresses something in a way that can be perceived by others. The gesture is singular, as it reflects an idiosyncratic quality of the individual expressing it. At the same time, it exists in a common realm and as such it can be approached by others as something meaningful, like the intention of a work of literature for Said. The pedagogical, conceived as a beginning, materialises through gestures.

Yet, perceiving something as meaningful, trying to understand it, doesn't imply it can ever be exhaustively explained. There remains a certain distance, something intuitive in reading gestures. Consequently, Rechia and Cubas do not intend to use gestures to teach their students a set of scripted behaviours, something to be followed one on one. Instead, they aim to develop a sensibility for teaching as an infinite number of pedagogical gestures that exist in this space between the singular and the common.

When discussing cooperation, Richard Sennett (2012) describes the reading of small gestures in terms of empathy. Empathy is not just identification with someone else's feelings through imagining what it must be like to be the other person. Rather, empathy “attends to another person on his or her own terms” (p. 475). It is a demanding exercise that involves paying close attention to the specificity of the other's expressions. It's about developing a sensibility for how things are said and, consequently, reading intentions between the lines.

In his case, the gestures are perhaps more seen as a direct interaction between individuals who stand on an equal footing, whereas Rechia and Cubas think more from a classroom situation pivoting around the figure of the teacher. I appreciate

the attention Rechia and Cubas pay to the study of gestures as constitutive of the practice of the teacher, and, therefore, of studying education. However, thinking of Sennett and his study of the complex social dynamics of cooperation, I believe this can be expanded to include the pedagogical situation in its entirety and to take the exchange of gestures or the relationship between gestures of individuals as the primary object of study.

In the case of the student-led activities, observing others while also attending to oneself allows one to ask questions such as “what situation do I take as a call to action?” and “what do I want my actions to instigate?”. Or: “how does what I do relate to what I think, and vice versa?”. Activities like the one described allow for a rehearsal of gestures around pedagogical responsiveness. When do you step in and when do just let things run their course?

For instance, rehearsing education typically reveals a whole spectrum of possibilities for staying silent. An experienced educator can deliberately choose when not to respond. Their body language can express something like: I value you sharing your experiences with us. Or it can simply mean: I do not know how to respond to this, I need to think about it. Once paying attention to the gestures of education, I believe this studying through comparison simply happens. In that sense it exists beyond any formalised learning strategy. The didactics supporting this process is mostly about creating space for study, which also means leaving a lot to informal responses and exchanges. In that sense, the prerequisite of studying teaching through things such as gestures is a trust that transcends institutional hierarchies, both on the side of teacher-student and student-teacher.

Conclusion

In this article I propose to approach studying art education through the lens of beginning – not as something one does once, but as constitutive of the practice of

a teacher. Similar to how an artist works in a process-based manner, teaching is an embodied practice built on repetition that allows one to shape an individual way of being and doing things. Formal education often seeks to prepare for professional efficiency. In the case of teacher training in the Netherlands, through trying to define the set of knowledge and skills an individual needs to possess to be 'able to start'. However relevant this may be, I am interested in how one can also acknowledge a not-being-ready as part of the ethos of the teacher.

Furthermore, I have attempted to show, through a concrete example from my practice as an educator working with students who are or will become art teachers, how the classroom can be used to rehearse pedagogical situations. By taking turns in proposing activities, students become student-teachers and teachers become teacher-students. Rehearsing beginning has two functions: first of all, it allows students to test out fragile new practices and secondly, it allows for a study of the gestures that form an art educator's ways of being and doing. Rehearsing means repeating something over and over again, not to produce sameness, but to allow difference to come into being, the particularity of a way of relating to yourself and what there is around you.

Throughout this article, my aim is to show how teaching itself can become what Freire calls a cognisable object, or, thinking of Stefano Harney, an occasion for study. Examining the concept of beginning through the lens of the work of various practitioners and theorists, I have tried to acknowledge the open-endedness of artistic and pedagogical processes alike. In that sense, the larger project that motivates this text is to find a language that emphasises a common ground for both art and education, a language that doesn't reduce one domain to being merely a function of the other. In certain respects, the practice of an art educator is interdisciplinary, and it is exciting to think about how concepts can travel between artistic and educational practices.

I started by saying that I don't think this tension between defining the outcome and embracing openness can or even needs to be resolved. Institutions might feel like bureaucratic monoliths and, in the Netherlands, I do observe an ever-increasing desire amongst at least one group of policy makers and teachers to control learning. This is something that must be addressed. Yet, on a daily basis I also see the messiness of the actual reality of the academy and that is where moments of beginning can be validated. It's a sideways move within. A student recently told me that after her first trimester at the academy she understood that it is fine to not know things. As an educator, I can hardly ask for more. If a student can articulate their relation to their own not-knowing, they begin to understand what it means to begin.

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