

# Crossing boundaries by living your question

15 November 2023, Daan Buijs

How to create space for  
existential questions in your  
education?



*“You are so young, so much before all beginning, and I would like to beg you dear Sir, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a foreign language. Don’t search for the answer, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.” (Rilke, 1984)*

# Living the question!

- In a system directed at giving answers, students get stuck at questions that can only be lived
- These slow or existential questions are questions youngsters encounter naturally during their educational career (Ristiniemi et al., 2018)



# Existential questions

- These questions are about identity and becoming:

*What kind of work/study would I want to do?*

- About dealing with personality:

*How can I deal with my procrastination?*

- Or about relating to the others and world:

*How can I deal with climate change?*



# Living the question?

- Some questions students experience are slow or existential questions (Buijs & Wals, 2022)

# How are existential questions related to boundary crossing?

- Both boundaries and existential questions share the characteristic that you do not choose them but run into them.
- But there is also a difference, a boundary is often first experienced as external, while a question is internal. Here lies the key for crossing



# Living your question

- When you see that the boundary has also an inner part, you can word this as a question
- Questions create an inner movement, that connects to what you run into, and create a dance or a dialogue

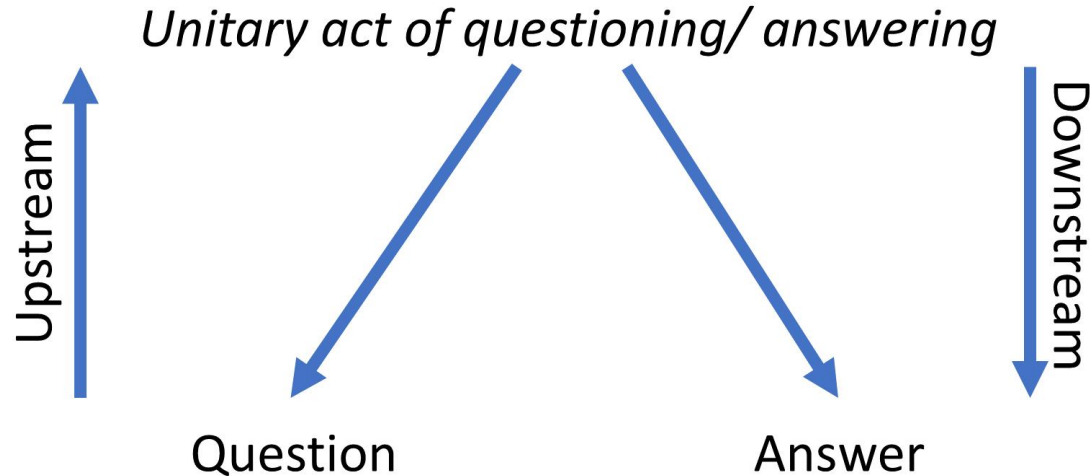


# Living the question in transdisciplinary learning

- All disciplines can merge through the perspective of the question (Nixon, 2017)
- Condition for this is that students are given the freedom to find their own answers (Biesta, 2021)
- The more students can engage with the question, the stronger this works (Gadamer, 2013)



# Looking at what is happening



Buijs, D. G. A., & Saeverot, H. (In Press). Taking Appearance in education seriously: transforming Bortoft's wisdom to education. In J. Baldacchino & H. Saeverot (Eds.), *Bloomsbury Handbook of Continanal Philosophy of Education*. Bloomsbury.

# Exploring existential questions

- Existential questions impose themselves
- Arise from a given tension, experienced in an emotion

## **How to explore:**

- What is keeping you most busy during the day?
- Which thoughts keep turning back?
- Do you have regular moods that keep coming back?

# Exploring existential questions

1. Identify what keeps you busy (thoughts, moods, impulses)
2. Explore what kind of tension they open up
  - a) This can be a tension between (or a combination):
    - i. **Past** (how you have always done things) and **Future** (how you would like things to become)
    - ii. **Facts** (what you encounter) and **your own meaning making** (norms, values, concepts)
    - iii. **Goals** (what you want) and **Means** (how you can reach what you want)

FACTS/DATA (*perceiving*)

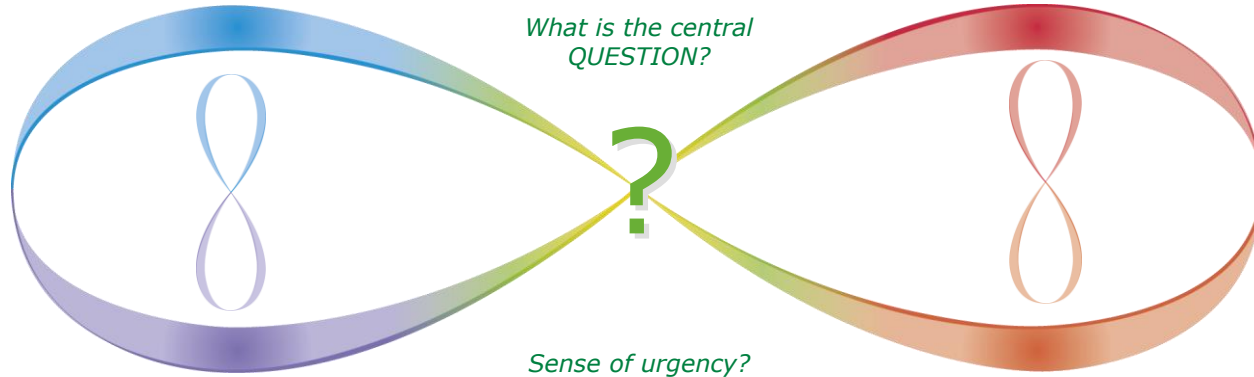
*What's going on?  
Experiences?  
Bottlenecks? Feelings?*

GOALS/INTERESTS (*willing*)

*What is the bigger purpose?  
What do you want to achieve?  
Outcome?*

PROBLEM/QUESTION (*FEELING*)

*What is the central  
QUESTION?*



*Sense of urgency?*

*What do you understand by ...?*

*Vision? Points of view?  
Which value is at stake?*

*What is needed for this?  
Method?*

*What and who is needed?  
What needs to be lived?*

CONCEPTS/IDEARS (*thinking*)

**NOW**

MEANS/WAYS (*acting*)

**PAST**

**FUTURE**

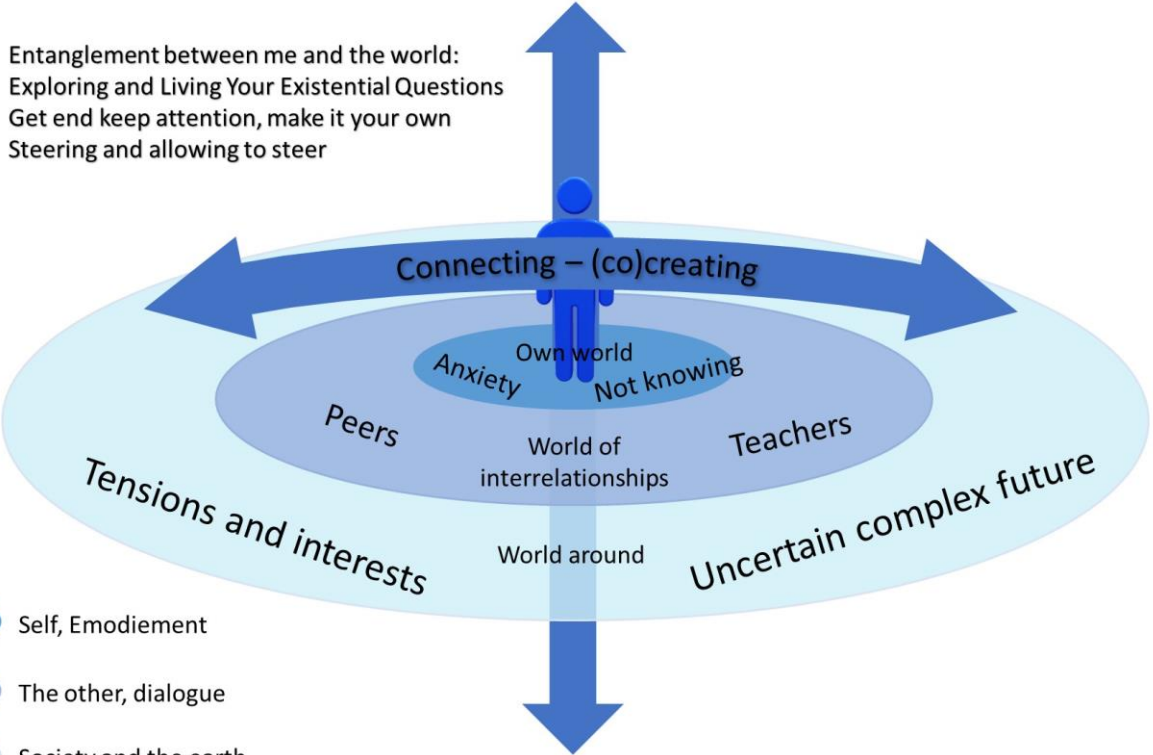
# How to situate this within education?

- As students cannot choose their existential questions, they can also not be assessed.
- Existential questions can only thrive outside of the educational system of grading
- This creates a free space within education, where students can become aware of their entanglement with education as a student

# Educational ecology



Entanglement between me and the world:  
Exploring and Living Your Existential Questions  
Get end keep attention, make it your own  
Steering and allowing to steer



- Self, Emodiement
- The other, dialogue
- Society and the earth

Anchoring  
Discovering yourself and the world

# Design principles

**How do you conduct the conversation?**

**On anchoring the student in themselves**

**About the student's connection to the world**

**What is your existential question?**