

Teacher Praise and Encouragement: Towards an Education for Democracy

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Abstract

International education tests, such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), steer the debate about education, form the image of a school, and specify the goals and objectives of the curriculum. Thus praise, prizes and other positive reinforcements become common methods in school. Through Franz Kafka's *Letter to his Father* I examine encouragement and teacher praise, which are, when we look into it, held in the grip of behaviourism. I take issue with this dominant thinking and make an attempt to go beyond praise and encouragement as positive reinforcements of desired behaviours that are postulated in advance. I make an educational argument out of Heidegger's phenomenological term, *Ereignis*, and suggest that teachers ought to praise that which the student is suited for and not only when they have fulfilled the demands of the curriculum. I also make an educational argument out of two Derridaean terms, hospitality and forgiveness, and claim that teachers ought to give back – through praise and encouragement – the students' self-respect, whatever their faults. Instead of being manipulative and serving narcissistic needs, praise ought to serve an education for democracy.

Introduction

In one of my lectures at the University of Bergen I gave my students (who are to become teachers) a list of twenty assumptions as to why teachers should not praise their pupils. It was easy to find such assumptions because I had famous philosophers, psychologists and educationalists on my side, giants like Nietzsche, Piaget and Dewey. Here are ten of those assumptions:

1. Public praise in class can make the pupil embarrassed and can cause certain problems with regard to the other pupils, who may for example consider the praised pupil as the favourite of the teacher.

2. Praise is often given as a balance to criticism. When the pupil has improved his/her work after being criticized by the teacher s/he will be praised. However, the teacher will indicate this: 'I said you could do better and I was right!'
3. Teachers tend to compare pupils when they praise. For example: 'Mathilde has really done a great job cleaning her desk!' The teacher indicates that the other pupils ought to follow Mathilde's example. This can have different sorts of unfortunate consequences.
4. Praise is often used as a means to manipulate the pupils. 'Nice jacket, Aurora!' The purpose of this praise can simply be to have a troublesome pupil on one's side.
5. Pupils who take initiative will have more praise than those who don't. An unfortunate consequence of this is that some pupils will have less praise because they are quiet.
6. The teacher uses praise in situations where the pupil neither needs nor wants praise. Thus praise can disturb, and perhaps confuse, instead of being helpful.
7. Praise is used to gain advantages. When a father praises his son for being unselfish, for example, he may do it because it is advantageous for him (but not for the child).
8. Praise can lead the attention away from the necessary action and over to an unhealthy classroom atmosphere where the pupils flatter the teacher in order to be praised.
9. The teacher does not praise so as to give recognition but in order to have it him- or herself.
10. Pupils who are used to having a lot of praise will be less susceptible to criticism.

I wanted the students to argue for and/or against these assumptions and to tell me why they thought as they did. Some students thought they should not praise the pupils. Should teachers really not praise their pupils? My conclusion was/is that teachers ought to praise. However it did not seem so in the beginning of the lecture. Incidentally one of the students had to leave class early this day, and she left the room thinking that a teacher should not praise. I told her later my aims with the lecture, and one aim was to show the students that one ought to reflect upon praise so that it will not end up as a means to manipulate or control behaviours – which is the opposite of democratic values.¹ I also wanted the students to draw out what was deliberately left 'invisible' in the list: namely, reasons as to why teachers should praise their pupils. Now, there are those who will disagree with me. According to the American educator, Alfie Kohn, a teacher ought not to praise. His claim is that praise manipulates and creates 'praise junkies' or pupils who are hooked on praise (Kohn, 2001). Teacher praise might lead to a classroom atmosphere where the pupils try to flatter the teacher in order to get praise. Although Kohn has a point here, he is too one-sided in his judgment about teacher praise. Besides, one cannot leave out something so natural in our language as praise. Or as another of my students proposed, perhaps one should not complicate the matter, but rather, open up the classroom with a kind of Mediterranean or Latin atmosphere? Accordingly, the teacher should not think this or that with regard to praise, rather, everything should happen in a spontaneous way. There would be a lot of gestures, laughing, shouting and praising. I thought it was a great and praiseworthy thought and probably a lot of pupils would enjoy themselves in such a classroom. On the other hand I think that such a temperamental teacher could easily surrender to spontaneity without memory, that is, everything happens here and now – so that the history of the pupil is not considered. Thus the

teacher may be blinded to what the pupils are suited for, which is a theme I want to discuss more fully in this article.

The main theme of this article is teacher praise and encouragement – and the point of view will be Franz Kafka's (1883-1924) as articulated in the *Letter to his Father* (1919). In particular, I will look closely at this paragraph, which I will return to throughout this article:

What I would have needed was a little encouragement [*Aufmunterung*], a little friendliness, a little keeping open of my road, instead of which you blocked it for me, though of course with the good intention of me taking another road. But I was not fit for that. You encouraged me [*muntertest mich*], for instance, when I saluted and marched smartly, but I was no future soldier, or you encouraged me [*muntertest mich*] when I was able to eat heartily or even drink beers with my meals, or when I was able to repeat songs, singing what I had not understood, or prattle to you using your own favorite expressions, imitating you, but nothing of this had anything to do with my future. And it is characteristic that even today you really only encourage [*aufmunterst*] me when you yourselves are involved in it, when what is at stake is your own sense of self-importance, which I damage (for instance by my intended marriage) or which is damaged in me (for instance when Pepa is abusive to me). Then I receive encouragement [*aufgemuntert*], I am reminded of my worth, the matches I would be entitled to make are pointed out to me, and Pepa is condemned utterly. But apart from the fact that at my age I am already nearly unsusceptible to encouragement [*Aufmunterung*], what help could it be to me anyway, if it only comes when it isn't primarily a matter of myself at all? (Kafka, 1966, pp. 16-19).

The word 'encouragement' is used six times in this paragraph, and is usually not used in the same sense as 'praise'. The big difference is that encouragement does not point to the value of what is being affirmed (Hitz & Driscoll, 1989). But we also find similarities. Encouragement means for Kafka a reminder of worth, and so does praise. Praise is 'to commend the worth of or to express approval or admiration' (Brophy, 1981, p. 5). We praise that which is praiseworthy. According to the *Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, 'praise' harkens back to the old French word *preisier*, meaning 'to prize, praise', and to the Latin word *pretium*, which means 'price'. Praise is given kind of as a price or on account of something praiseworthy. Praise is a testimony of what someone has done, or better said, an expression of respect and gratitude towards the other. Going back to the words from the letter it is obvious that the father, Hermann Kafka, did not honour and appreciate what his son wanted to do with his life. What Franz Kafka was interested in and fit/suited for was not judged as valuable by the father. He only encouraged his son whenever he did something that could be related to himself.

Er-eignis

Let me pursue this particular line of thought and go from father to teachers, but first a little detour to a curriculum, which is designed to reach specific goals. Whenever the curriculum

becomes very specific with regard to goals and objectives it is difficult for the teacher to go beyond these constraints. The teacher can easily become like the father of Kafka, someone who does not listen to what the pupil is suited for. Hence s/he will praise in accordance with the ideas and beliefs of the curriculum. Shouldn't teachers praise the pupils whenever they fulfil the content of the curriculum? Shouldn't teachers use praise as a means to reinforce the fulfilment of the curriculum? Shouldn't praise give clear directions or show clearly where to go? I will not say no to these questions because teachers have to follow the curriculum. It's their job. However this way of praising, which I will say is behaviouristic, has its drawbacks. That's my job to point out, which I will first do with the help of Rousseau's educational treatise, *Émile* (1762). He says (with his typical eccentric outspokenness): 'Of course by this method you will make him stupid if you are always giving him directions, always saying come here, go there, stop, do this, don't do that' (Rousseau, 2003, p. 97). When praise is used as a means to educate or give directions in subjects and the like, when teachers indicate (through praise): 'yes, go there, continue to do that', the pupil might be following the road of an other, the teacher that is, and when the other is gone the pupil may stumble and fall because s/he is not suited for this road. When I say 'suited for' am I then talking about today's hysteria about talent,ⁱⁱ that teachers should concentrate on the pupils' talents only? No, and I will like to go to Goethe's character Wilhelm Meister in order to clarify why.

The father of Wilhelm Meister had the same occupation as Kafka's father; they were both traders. In *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795-96) Meister refused to follow the footsteps of his father and become a trader. He broke with that tradition (incidentally so did Kafka) and became an actor instead. Eventually though he understood that he never had a talent for acting. As a result, he left the theatre and Goethe had to write *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (1821-29) in which Meister continued to search for the gift that nature had given him. After a long journey of wandering he found it; he knew that he was to become a surgeon (*ein Wundarzt*). On the one hand Goethe understood that the son can be fit for different things than the father, something Kafka's father did not seem to understand. This is something teachers ought to consider when they praise their pupils. They ought not to forget that pupils can be suited for different things than the content of the curriculum. On the other hand though, Goethe made huge restrictions with regard to the journey of education. That is, he followed Rousseau's very restricted goal of education which was to let each individual devote himself to a trade for which he has a talent.ⁱⁱⁱ The first step of this type of education is to find one's talent and the trade for which one is best adapted. The second step is to practice and make oneself master of the trade. Talent is everything and the teacher's task would be to find the talent of the pupil and praise him/her whenever s/he made use of the talent, making sure to keep the pupil on this one and only road.

Kafka's point is different than Goethe's. Sure he wanted encouragement for the trade he wanted to devote himself to (a writer), but notice that he relates the encouragement to little things or trifles from everyday life such as walking, drinking and singing. Kafka here goes beyond talent and indicates that each individual is fit for more than one thing. There is no talk of a gift that Nature has laid in the cradle, but a gift that is drawn out of a relationship. The educational consequences of this are very demanding because the teacher has to watch/listen very carefully to what the pupils do/say. Teachers or those who have been teachers in the primary school (like myself) know that pupils do not always know themselves what they are

suited for, but they give hints and winks through their body language and words. Thus the teacher must, at times, sacrifice both their own and the curricula's ideas and beliefs. Otherwise they might be deaf and blind like Kafka's father (who figures in the letter). However, the sacrifice is everything but a loss because it will make it possible to see and hear what the pupil is suited to. The task is to praise and encourage these trifles that might come to the eyes and ears.

Now Heidegger's phenomenological term, *Ereignis*, can broaden our understanding with regard to this matter. What does it mean? Briefly said, the noun *Das Ereignis* can be translated as 'event', 'occurrence', 'withdrawal'.^{iv} The verb *eignen* has a slightly different meaning. On the one hand it means 'belong', 'own'. For example, 'something belongs to him' in German is, *etwas eignet ihm*. On the other hand it can also mean 'to be proper for', 'to be suited for' and in German, this is *sich eignen für*.^v We also ought to include the older understanding of *ereignen* as *eräugen*, meaning 'to have in one's eyes'.^{vi} To bring these thoughts about *Er-eignis* elsewhere, we might say that the teacher has to take a step back so as to have the eyes (*Augen*) or ears (because the teacher must listen as s/he looks) for what is suited to the pupil. Both time and space are integrated in this sentence and Heidegger made a time-space term out of *Er-eignis*. Now I can go back to the letter and try to explain the relation between praise and encouragement and time-space.

Mirroring

Kafka's words from the letter indicate that encouragement is related to both time and space. Encouragement and praise are given here (place) and now (time) and have the power to open a path (space) for the future (time). With regard to space, encouragement and praise can lead the pupil to a common ground or a 'new'/different ground/path, a path for which the pupil is suited. This is one of the big issues in the letter. Kafka was thirty-six years old when he wrote it, thinking back to the time when he had not yet started his educational journey to become a writer. The father, a big and powerful man, silenced this future calling by projecting his own thoughts into the son, a skinny and scared kid, quite the opposite of his father. Nevertheless, Kafka managed to go past the impediments presented by the father and answered his future calling so as to become a writer. He was, however, clearly marked by the father's upbringing, otherwise he would not have written the letter. Kafka became both ashamed (because he did not live up to the hopes of the father) and almost immune to encouragement (or as Kafka put it: 'I am already nearly unsusceptible to encouragement'). The future never called for this, and the letter indicates that Kafka was wounded because of the father's interference with the future calling.^{vii} Thus I will like to propose that the teacher should not project, but reflect. And so we are back to the term *Er-eignis*. The teacher must catch what reflects from the pupil, and then reflect upon this before it is returned as a reflection. So when the teacher responds with praise, for example, the pupil is able to see him- or herself. The teacher becomes kind of like a mirror, that is to say, the praised one can 'see' him- or herself – in the face of an other, a different face – not who s/he is, but who s/he may become. Generally speaking, those who are praised will, experience a positive sensation^{viii} instead of the shocking sensation (and sometimes educative effect) that is sometimes provided by criticism.^{ix} In this case the pupil will see that his/her act is praiseworthy: 'I can do this, there is

hope for me.’ With hope we are concerned with the future, but also with the past because seeing into the future is about looking into the rear-view mirror, like Prudencia. I am not talking about a method wherein the teacher tells the pupil to reflect; no, I am talking about the ‘natural’ effects of praise. Which is? A positive atmosphere which will stimulate the pupil to reflect (in retrospect) and thus open up a ‘new’ and different approach towards the future. Of course, the teacher cannot simply say: ‘Good!’ That word says nothing. The praise has to provide a sort of explanation as to why the thing was worthy of praise and thereby opening it up for reflection.

This kind of teacher is very different from Kafka’s father because s/he *sees* the pupil. And if the pupil is responsive to praise s/he might have increased self-esteem and could also see him- or herself in a new light. This is the educative effect of praise, that is, it can cause the individual to enlarge and reshape his/her self-image. However, there is more to it than this. The teacher, too, will have ‘new’ eyes. As the teacher gives praise something other and different may come to his/her eyes (*er-äugen*), which gives the teacher an opportunity to see the pupil in yet another light. The *Psalms* from the *Bible* offer a similar thought: ‘Enter into his [God’s] gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise’ (Psalms 100:4). The one who gives praise and thanksgiving is brought into the presence of God. Thus God is seen in a different way, a way he has not been seen before. Similarly, when the teacher is praising, lifting up the pupil, the gate or the door (a typical Kafkian metaphor) into the pupil’s presence will be opened. Furthermore, the appreciation and gratefulness will allow the teacher to catch glimpses of the pupil’s hitherto hidden idiosyncrasies.

Since I took an example from the *Bible* I must say that the Judeo-Christian way of praising is an expression of worship. One is to bow down and kneel before God. According to Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka is against the bending of the head, instead he affirms a straightening of one’s head (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 5). The reason is, simply put, that one will go ‘blind’ if one looks down because the view is restricted to one point only. Such things as shamefulness, fear and lack of self-esteem (ghosts that Kafka had to fight all his life) can cause individuals to bend their heads. Incidentally teachers tend to bend their heads. On the one hand this is due to physical circumstance, that is, teachers bend their heads in front of the pupils because they are usually taller than the pupils. On the other hand though, teachers tend to look down upon the pupils, indicating: ‘I am the knowledgeable one; I am the one who will tell you how things are.’ The Kafkian teacher, if I may put it like that, is very different. This teacher will also bend down, however, this bending occurs in order to come close to the ground; to be humble.^x S/he is not humbling him- or herself in the Judeo-Christian tradition, in which the individual, when offering praise, bows so as to become nothing in the presence of Almighty God. On the contrary, the teacher straightens the head, looking the pupil into the eyes; and in so doing, s/he can see what the pupils cannot see themselves. Nobody can see their own eyes as seeing. One can only see oneself through the reflection that comes back through a mirror or the other (*er-äugen*). Through the reflection of praise one can see oneself in a positive light, that is to say, through genuine praise where the eyes smile. Teachers shouldn’t bother to praise if their eyes are not smiling, otherwise, they become deceivers whose eyes do not smile; only the mouth of the deceiver smiles. Pupils, especially the older ones, can easily see through such a teacher. And when this happens the chance of being brought into the pupil’s space is lost. How, then, can teachers manage this? My suggestion is: through forgiveness.

Forgiveness

According to Derrida in *Hostipitality*, the thinker of *Er-eignis* (Heidegger), never thought about forgiveness:

Here is what all classical philosophy of time, until Bergson and Heidegger, will have missed. They have missed forgiveness, all these philosophers of time; in sum, they have not thought forgiveness. And thereby [*et du coup*], they have missed time, they have lacked the time to think time, which thinks only from [*depuis*] forgiveness (Derrida, 2002, p. 394).

The phenomenological term *Er-eignis* lacks something: namely, forgiveness – which must be considered whenever one thinks about time-space. Forgiveness has to be part of *Er-eignis*, otherwise the difference of the other might not come to the eyes. For sure, the Heideggerian term is most worthy of respect, but as long as it has no reference to forgiveness it is constrained and limited. That is why it must be stretched to cover forgiveness. To miss forgiveness, like Bergson and Heidegger, will mean that one is too occupied to see oneself and thus unable to see the other. Now did Kafka really see his father? I think he only saw one side of his father in the beginning of the letter; the rebukes and blames of the father made him blind, but then he starts to catch glimpses of other, hidden sides of his father. Slowly but steadily the letter starts to change, it swerves away from the blame and critique and Kafka finds room to praise his father. ‘You have a particularly beautiful, very rare way of quietly, contentedly, approvingly smiling, a way of smiling that can make the person for whom it is meant entirely happy’ (Kafka, 1966, p. 43). The son is praising his father, whatever his father’s faults. Hence this is a sign of forgiveness, which causes Kafka to see the father in a different way. One needs to consider, however, two different ways to forgive.

First there is forgiveness that expects something in return. There is nothing more vulgar, impolite and even wounding than this kind of forgiving, says Derrida (2002, p. 398). The reason is that it destroys the gift. It is like giving a gift and at the same time expecting that the receiver shall return this gift with another gift. Unfortunately this will easily happen in a school that follows a strict curriculum. Let me offer a concrete example. In 2006 Norway introduced a new national curriculum in Primary and Lower Secondary Education. It is called *The Knowledge Promotion* [*Kunnskapsløftet*] and a major term in this curriculum is ‘adapted education’ [*tilpasset opplæring*]. Two Norwegian educationalists, Kari Bachmann and Peder Haug, investigated this particular term. In their report they interpreted a classroom study and say that teachers in Primary and Lower Secondary Education gave a lot of public praise, but that this is combined with the absence of explicit and clear requirements with regard to the subject (Bachmann & Haug, 2006, p. 49). In other words, teachers should first and foremost praise whenever the pupil has fulfilled the requirements of the curriculum. Such praise is behaviouristic in nature, because it functions as a reward for behaviours and accomplishments that the teachers want to continue to see. Praise is used to strengthen behaviours and accomplishments that the

curriculum has defined as positive. The pupils better fulfil the content of the curriculum, the commonsense, the common path. Generally speaking, authoritative teachers who think like this can hardly forgive, and if they do find an opportunity to forgive, they will always demand something in return. They will praise while expecting something in return. Here's an example: 'Good answer, Ane, but you'd better follow the syllabus next time.' This is an example of the vulgar forgiveness, that is, the teacher forgives the pupil by praising that which lies outside the curriculum but s/he also demands something in return. In fact, the teacher tries to lead the pupil onto the common path again. The teacher ends up taking instead of giving; s/he takes away the pupil's self-respect.

Second, there is forgiveness or giving without return (Derrida, 2002, p. 386). How can we relate this to praise and encouragement? Briefly said, the teacher gives back, praising or encouraging and expects no gratitude or thankfulness in return when the pupil has acted beyond that which is postulated in advance. Praise and encouragement should be given without hope of being acknowledged or without hope of any return whatsoever. The teacher must not even say that s/he forgives the pupil. This is also Derrida's point: 'one must not say, that one forgives' (2002, p. 398). Yet again Kafka offers us a good example. I am thinking about the fact that he never sent the letter to his father. Thus he was able to forgive without return. Kafka of the letter even gives back the father's self-respect by letting him speak for himself. We hear the father's voice, but only through Kafka's invention. As such he forgives his father even though his father has been a brute. He doesn't agree with his father though; and he answers back. This example shows, I think, that praise and encouragement can be lifted out of the stimulus-response thinking of behaviourism. Praise, in this manner, no longer serves narcissistic needs or lets pupils think that they are better than the others. Instead praise has a critico-political function, that is, the other is allowed to speak beyond the beliefs and thoughts of the teacher and others; yes, the difference of the others' thinking is considered as praiseworthy. Furthermore, Kafka returned his father's self-respect; he gave back, but not everything. He appreciated the statement of his father, but not all of the content. The same can be said in a classroom situation. Consider the pupil who says that the gas chambers at Auschwitz never existed. I think a lot of teachers would reprimand such a pupil, but the forgiving teacher would in fact appreciate that the pupil expressed him- or herself – because democratic values such as the right to speak out and to take part in decision making must be universal. However, the same teacher would certainly not appreciate the content, the destructiveness and delusion contained in the pupil's comment.

A similar example is considered in Derrida's last interview – *Learning to Live Finally*. Jean Birnbaum asks this question: 'But then what are we to do in the case of Holocaust revisionists who deny the existence of gas chambers and the reality of Shoah?' (Derrida, 2007, p. 48). Here is the first part of Derrida's answer:

One has the right to ask all questions. But when one responds to questions with falsifications or counter-truths, gestures that have nothing to do with honest research or critical thought, then that's something else. It's either incompetence or unjustified instrumentalism, and it has to be reprimanded, just as a bad student has to be reprimanded (2007, p. 48f).

Of course, we cannot tolerate such incompetent and harmful statements. If so it would be impossible to sustain a debate. Here I agree with Derrida but not where he says that ‘a bad student has to be reprimanded’. This Derrida is no educationalist because he ends up being judgmental, or prejudiced. Hence I’d like to go to another Derrida, the inviting one of the text *Hostipitality* [sic].

In this specific text the French philosopher talks about an unconditional openness to take in everything in one’s space (Derrida, 2002). But what would happen if the teacher totally accepted and praised the pupil for saying that Auschwitz never took place? It would destroy, not only the teacher’s space, but also the space of the whole democratic society. There must be no doubt as to whether Auschwitz really happened. Besides, we have tremendous evidence to support that it did happen.^{xi} Thus, the teacher must not let him- or herself be occupied by those who cling to such falsifications. How, then, should s/he deal with it? Through negotiation? In another situation that might be natural, but in this case the content is false and there is nothing to negotiate about. Nevertheless, the teacher should praise the pupil for expressing him- or herself. The next move would be to invite the pupil to a more fruitful debate, to interest him/her in different ways so that s/he is given an opportunity to be free from false beliefs. By doing so the teacher opens up for new possibilities of praise.^{xii}

Hospitality

If we read between the lines of Derrida’s text *Hostipitality* we’ll find at least two fears. The first one is the fear of occupying space, and crucial questions are: Am I not listening to the other, whose statements may be important? Am I making sure that the other is given the word? These are really questions that concern values of democracy, such as freedom of speech. With free speech comes a responsibility: making sure that everybody will be heard. This is how justice will be served and it is also a way to take care of each and every individual of the democratic society. The first step toward the exclusion of the individual’s participation in society is to not listen to the other. Thus, Derrida sees the importance of offering hospitality,^{xiii} which is a way of granting forgiveness (Derrida, 2002, p. 380). The hospitable person is opening his/her space, or better, lets this space remain open, in order to be able to receive the other. In Derrida there is talk of unconditional hospitality or ‘the exercise of impossible hospitality’, which means ‘to receive another guest whom I am incapable of welcoming’ (2002, p. 364). To see these words with regard to praise we might say that the teacher shall praise not only what s/he or the curriculum approves of; s/he shall also praise that which s/he, in the first place, is unreceptive to. In such an atmosphere praise will create openings. What I mean here is, as the teacher praises that which even lies outside his/her vocabulary, s/he is really indicating: ‘Come on! Speak! Say what you have on your mind. Don’t be afraid whether I agree with you or not’. This teacher is clearing a space and making sure that more voices can be heard, not just the voices that try to flatter the teacher or say the ‘right thing’, but also those eccentric voices that go beyond what is thought of as common sense.

The second fear in Derrida's text is the fear of taking hostage. Derrida gives an example that suits this article very well: he turns to the classroom and talks about the teacher who takes a hostage:

It is often the violent address of who has the authority and power to take hostage: 'You, for example', says the teacher in his class at the time of asking a question and verifying knowledge, while authoritatively designating someone summoned to respond, someone who can no longer avoid and must say 'present', 'here I am' (2002, p. 410).

In this case it is the authoritative teacher, who thinks s/he has knowledge on his/her side, who takes one of the pupils hostage. S/he forces the poor pupil into presence, and to take this a step further, I'd say: through his/her big ideas and dogmatic thinking s/he really has conquering intentions, just like Hermann Kafka, s/he wants to include the pupil into this space so that the pupil can speak and think like the teacher. The hospitable teacher on the other hand, waits and listens – which is the same as clearing a space so that the pupil can, as the educationalist Gert Biesta says, 'come 'into presence' ' (Biesta, 2006, p. 9). The same teacher also celebrates the unique and singular pupil, through praise and encouragement, not only when s/he is fulfilling certain expectations, but also when s/he moves beyond that which is expected and perhaps points out the limits of a certain way of thinking. This teacher arranges matters in such a way that the individual can come into a world that is populated by other unique and different individuals (see Biesta, 2006). Let me be more precise as to how this is possible.

Instead of taking hostage the teacher should offer him- or herself as a hostage (see Derrida, 2002, p. 376). One way of doing that is to praise the pupil – because praising the other means that you are brought into the space of the other; in a sense, you abandon yourself and become *like* the other, which is – of course – impossible, but through praise it is possible to do the impossible. Franz Kafka is, yet again, a prime example because he shows us that he really abandons himself so that he can be brought in the space of his father. He does so where he praises Hermann and also lets him speak. As such the son is able to be *like* his father. That is not to say that he can see Hermann as he *is*; no, he can only see him in a different light, bringing the father out of the shadow and making sure that he can stand forth as a singular, unique individual.

Thus we are brought full circle back to where I started: namely, to Kafka's quote, which indicates that we are being formed through our meetings with other people who are different than ourselves. The son is formed by his father's reactions, positive and negative, just as the pupil is being formed through the positive and negative reactions of the teacher. It is not necessarily so that 'positive' reactions such as praise and encouragement will have positive outcomes. On the contrary, they can really block the opportunities if praise is being given with the intent of bringing or keeping the person praised into the space or way of thinking of the person giving praise. Hermann Kafka is a good example. It is clear in the letter that he took poor Franz Kafka hostage. Thus we, educationalists, should always remember the case of Kafka. In general we should not forget that a teacher must give back the pupil's self-respect instead of taking it away. Whenever this is a reality, praise and encouragement will not clear away space, but offer space for the other.

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Endnotes

ⁱ Also pointed out by Alfie Kohn in the book *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, and Other Bribes*. Here is Kohn's words: 'More realistically, we must acknowledge that because pop behaviourism is fundamentally a means of controlling people, it is by its nature inimical to democracy, critical questioning, and the free exchange of ideas among equal participants' (Kohn, 1999, p. 30).

ⁱⁱ This hysteria about talent is manifested in TV shows like *American Idol*, *So you think you can dance*, *America's got talent* etc.

ⁱⁱⁱ Here are Rousseau's words: 'Let us form these ten men into a society, and let each devote himself to the trade for which he is best adapted, and let him work at it for himself and for the rest. Each will reap the advantage of the others' talents, just as if they were his own; by practice each will perfect his own talent' (Rousseau, 2003, p. 186). These words are echoed in Goethe's *Wanderjahre*: 'Übe dich zum tüchtigen Violinisten und sei versichert, der Kapellmeister wird dir deinen Platz im Orchester mit Gunst anweisen' (Goethe, 1999b, p. 37). This is really a metaphor. To practice to become a good violin player means that each citizen should restrict herself/himself to one craft, which s/he ought to master. Then the person can be sure that the conductor will be delighted to find her/him a place in the orchestra – which is a metaphor for society.

^{iv} In the famous lecture, *Time and Being*, Heidegger is close to this meaning where he says 'that to giving as sending there belongs keeping back – such that the denial of the present and the withholding of the present, play within the giving of what has been and what will be' (Heidegger, 2002a, p. 22). Heidegger has one name for this keeping back, denial and withholding: namely, withdrawal. Appropriation (*Ereignis*) is not only sending; no, as sending it is withdrawal, which gains distance to that which is about to arrive so as to remove distance.

^v Heidegger is also close to this meaning where he says: 'Appropriation neither *is*, nor *is* there' (Heidegger, 2002a, p. 24). 'What remains to be said?' Heidegger continues. 'Only this: Appropriation appropriates [*das Ereignis ereignet*]' (ibid.). To draw out the meaning of this we have to wander to another and earlier lecture, *The Principle of Identity*. Therein it is stated that man and Being belong together; they are suited for (*ereignet*) each other: '[...] man is delivered over to the ownership of Being and Being is appropriate to the essence of man [*der Mensch dem Sein vereignet, das Sein aber dem Menschenwesen zugeeignet ist*]' (Heidegger, 2002b, p. 36/100). As we have seen in the above, *Ereignis* is translated as appropriation, but this word is closer to the German word *aneignen*; to appropriate something, or to say it in German, *etwas aneignen*. All in all the English word, appropriation, does not capture all the meanings of the German word *Ereignis*.

^{vi} Heidegger of *Der Satz der Identität (The Principle of Identity)* is aware of that and writes *Ereignis* instead of *Ereignis* so as to open up for the meaning of *er-äugen*, that is, 'to have in one's eyes'. Here are Heidegger's words: 'Das Wort Ereignis ist der gewachsenen Sprache entnommen. Er-eignen heißt ursprünglich: er-äugen, d.h. er-blicken, im Blicken zu sich rufen, an-eignen' (Heidegger, 2002b, pp. 100f).

^{vii} I am here thinking in Heideggerian terms of the necessary step back so as to give an opening to that which is about to arrive, or as Heidegger says himself, ‘an allowing-to-presence that are there in destiny’ (Heidegger, 2002a, p. 21).

^{viii} Since we all have different temperaments, which can shift from hour to hour, not everybody will have this good sensation.

^{ix} Praise is different than criticism in several ways; for one thing it can help pupils know what to do, instead of what not to do. Nevertheless, my intention is not to replace praise with criticism. Education needs both.

^x According to the *Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, the word ‘humble’ derives from the Latin *humus*, meaning ‘ground’.

^{xi} The matter would of course be much more complicated if I talked about beliefs for which there is no evidence. One would have to ask, ‘Who is to decide what is false and what is true?’ Or, ‘How can one really say that a certain belief is false?’ And so on and so forth. These questions really are too complicated for this article, and I choose not to go into them.

^{xii} If, however, the pupil is totally immovable and continues to cling to the delusion or the counter-truth I think that s/he should be reprimanded.

^{xiii} In one particular passage in *Hostipitality* Derrida is showing that praise is related to hospitality. It can be seen where he quotes from Jean de Léry’s *History of a Voyage to The Land of Brazil, Otherwise Called America*. Here he is talking about the Tupinamba weepers who hail the stranger like a revenant. As the stranger enters the house he is offered to sit on a cotton bed. After a while the women come to the bed, holding both hands over their eyes while they are weeping, as a sign of welcoming. At the same time ‘they will say a thousand things in his praise’ (Derrida, 2002, p. 359). Praise is here related to the welcoming and can be seen as a sign of thanksgiving and celebration of the stranger’s return.