

**Speech Hong Kong University Women Award
December 2014, by Marloes van Houten**

“Education and learning environments tailor made to breed female leadership”

On behalf of all scholarship recipients, Marloes starts with expressing her gratitude for the donors who have been so generous to provide the Hong Kong University Award and Grant. She continues highlighting some of the current challenges and opportunities girls/women are facing in the educational setting, which are summarized below. For full documentation of the speech, you can contact Marloes at info@hearttohard.nl

A. Introduction “women and education”

These days, most would agree to the statement that education for girls and women is important. The right to education has been strongly affirmed in international law, for example in the Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960). The World Education Forum (2000) referred to education as a fundamental human right, and set objectives for achieving EFA goals based upon political commitments by the international community to achieve the right to basic education for all. The Millennium Declaration affirmed by World Leaders in the same year, and reaffirmed at the UN Summit in 2005, included two goals with a target date of 2015 that addressed education and women empowerment: “achieve universal primary education” and to “promote gender equality and empower women”.¹

B. Female leadership

In May 2014, I was listening to a speech on Female Leadership of Esther Mombo, a prominent African theologians, a member of the Kenian Circle of Concerned African Women Theologian, and Dean of Academics at the St. Paul’s University in Limuru. She defined female leadership in a way I could associate with “female leadership is about affirming life”....I would like to add the following “there where we have no access to education and other learning/growing opportunities, there were we are not valued for who we are but only for what we do, there were we do not feel the safety to make mistakes and learn by doing....we are not affirming life, because we do not give people the chance to develop the unique gift they have to offer to this world”.

We live in a rapidly changing world facing multiple crises (e.g. financial crisis in Europe/US, environmental degradation, political turmoil, etc.). The ability to recap what we learnt from a textbook is not going to solve these crises, which seems to ask more for the development of the following skills and competences: innovation, creativity and international cooperation. This sounds like female leadership will be in demand for the times ahead. A research published in a The Harvard Business Review Article in 2012, examined female leadership and showed that women scored higher on overall leadership effectiveness², with the largest positive differences made in the

¹ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/right-to-education/>

² A sample of 16,000 leaders was taken of whom two-thirds were male and one-third female, showed that women scored higher on overall leadership effectiveness, not just in the areas of ‘nurturing competencies’ like developing others, inspiring and motivating others, relationship building, collaboration and teamwork. The largest positive differences were “taking initiative,

areas of “taking initiative, displaying integrity and honesty, and driving for results. These are all skills that describe leaders who take on difficult challenges, ensure that people act with integrity, and who simply achieve challenging results.

All this, not to emphasize that female leadership is better than male leadership, but that they have something unique to offer that is worth developing and making room for.

C. Learning environment: culture of honor

The just outlined global challenges and the potential of female leadership is also why I have certain concerns about our current education system, which up until this day seems to focus on cognitive learning, or even merely on learning by heart and repetition for some parts of the world. Do these type of engagements with learning and education, prepare girls for approaching leadership as something that is about “affirming life”. And more generally speaking; does it prepare our children for the innovation, creativity, relationship building and international teamwork that are necessary to face and interact with the world’s current challenges? I pioneered for 5 years in the Netherlands in the areas of ‘whole person development and integrated learning’, together with emeritus professor in peace education, Lennart Vriens. He outlined the limits of a purely rational cognitive strategy to learning as follows: “it does little to support young people in their social learning and the development of their personality; to grow in wisdom and experience in their interaction with essential human phenomena of the affective domain, like friendship, love, hate, involvement in human values, creativity, intuition, etc”.³

Creating a safe learning environment is a very important element in any type of learning process! Learning should be fun; a place where we feel we are seen, where we can fail safely and try again. This with the underlying belief that learning is a life long, enjoyable, and sometimes challenging process that is enjoyable and enriching and yes also challenging at times.

The implicit and explicit messages we are teaching should be in line. It would be very ineffective and hypocritical to teach about human understanding and equality, while in our way of teaching we belittle the learners because we think we are in a position that allows us to do so. I started to work with using a concept that changed the learning environment and the interaction with my students, and coach clients, and movement participants I worked with. The concept is called “a culture of honor”, referring to an environment that sustains life, hope, honor and destiny, were individuals feel invited to come more fully to life and are stimulated to live up onto their full potential! ⁴. The following elements were important to create a culture of honor.

1. Learning not through (moral) punishment by criticism (or other indirect ways) but through

displaying integrity and honesty, and driving for results”. These competencies highlight that women were seen as more effective in getting things done, being role models and delivering results. Read more: <http://www.businessinsider.com/study-women-are-better-leaders-2014-1#ixzz3LhkrG3m>

³ Vriens, Lennart, 2004. Peace Education: Cooperative Building of a Human Future. In: Pastoral Care in Education. 15 (4), p. 25-30.

⁴ It is a concept I was introduced to through the Bethel Redding Church in California, and the writings of one of their leading figures, Danny Lee Silk.

invitation and encouragement.

2. Collective responsibility for the learning process
3. Trust & safe to make mistakes.
4. Being a facilitator of learning instead of staying with the hierarchic teacher-student relationship
5. Time to learn by doing
6. Time to learn in your speed

[Marloes gives examples of all five points, mainly related to an international summer school on Creative Peace and Human Rights Education at the University of Utrecht, she coordinated from 2008-2013. See photo below].⁵



D. Broad theory of learning

Preparing youth for the challenges of today's rapidly changing world, asks for a broad theory of learning, which includes the cognitive, the affective and the action domain of human understanding, which have their own rationality.⁶

In the international education project of the summer school in Utrecht, we worked with a broad theory of learning, and a culture of honor as a learning environment. While building on Neil Fleming and co-workers definition of four learning styles: visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic, we developed an integrated approach to learning, in which the cognitive, affective and action elements each had their place.⁷

Cognitive learning	(head) (conflict analysis)
Affective learning	(heart) (what to do with feelings of love and hatred)
Action learning	(hands) (interacting with conflict affected people)

⁵ In this two week summer school: artists, educators and (I)NGO workers from around the world came to the Netherlands to learn about how to use multiple art forms in peace and human rights work.

⁶ Houten, M. van & L.J.A. Vriens (2012), 'A Complex Peace Education Project: The Utrecht Summer school Education For Peace and Human Rights'. <http://www.pef.unilj.si/fileadmin/Datoteke/Mednarodna/conference/eaen.pdf> European Network of Affective Education, May 2012, pp. 200-214

⁷ Fleming, N., and Mills, C., 1992, Not Another Inventory, Rather a Catalyst for Reflection, Published in: To Improve the Academy, Vol. 11, Page 137):

[Marloes gives examples of projects she has initiated or been involved in related to cognitive, affective and action learning].

Alternatives

How to use the above outlined integrated approach to learning in practice?

There are many possibilities. Let me just share some examples to hopefully inspire you.

1. Dance to learn math?

Jacob Pillow's "Curriculum in Motion" program:

In the program, third graders at Pittsfield's Conte Community School engaged in dance to better understand mathematical fractions. "So we come up with lovely, varied reaching high movements to remember that the numerator is on the top and the denominator, which happens to begin with 'D' is a downward movement," explained Glover.

<http://wamc.org/post/dance-and-fractions-jacobs-pillow-curriculum-program-aims-teach-math>

2. Learning by doing

The video speaks for itself. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0O6VAbnDt8&feature=youtu.be>