

# IN WHICH SITUATIONS DOES CURIOSITY FEEL WELCOME?

BUILDING TESTSITUATIONS  
WITH- AND FOR CHILDREN  
AGED 8 - 10 AT THE  
KINDERFACULTEIT PENDRECHT



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ZOEK DE WEG  
(SUPERDUO, 2022)

# PREFACE

## ZOEK DE WEG

This person holding the cardboard sign is me. I am an artist/educator. In a moment I will tell you more about who I am and what I do.

When I was a student I hitchhiked a lot and made signs like this to show where I wanted to go. But it was mainly the experience I was looking for, instead of the transportation to another location. It felt like stepping into an exciting situation where I had the role of a curious passenger, ready to learn more about the unknown person who would pull over.

Imagine that you are the driver of the silver car. You are intrigued and you stop. Let's switch places: I'll be the driver today. You will be the curious hitchhiker. I know the sign promised we're looking for THE way, but that's just a joke. You and I will look for many ways.



# **1. POSITION**

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## 1.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

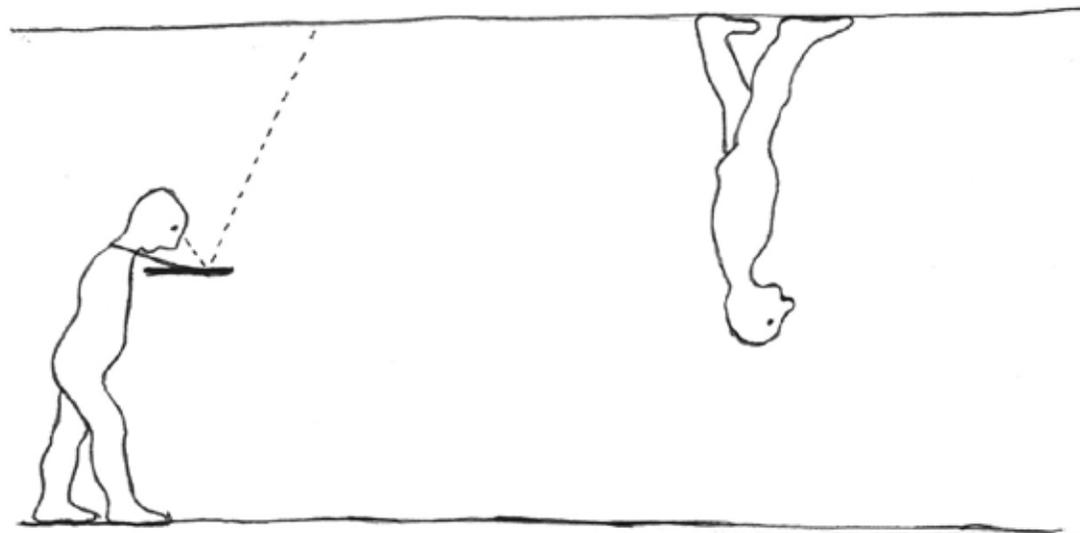
What kind of artist/educator am I? And do these titles fit my work? I see a mixture of possible titles, possible disciplines; next to art and education you could add psychology, sociology, and some philosophical influences.

I am influenced by the way I grew up, as daughter of a medical doctor and a psychologist. Human behavior was everyday material; this setting stimulated the observing and imagining attitude I adopted.

My mother once showed me that when you hold a mirror horizontally at the height of your shoulders, the ceiling presents itself as the floor. Walking through

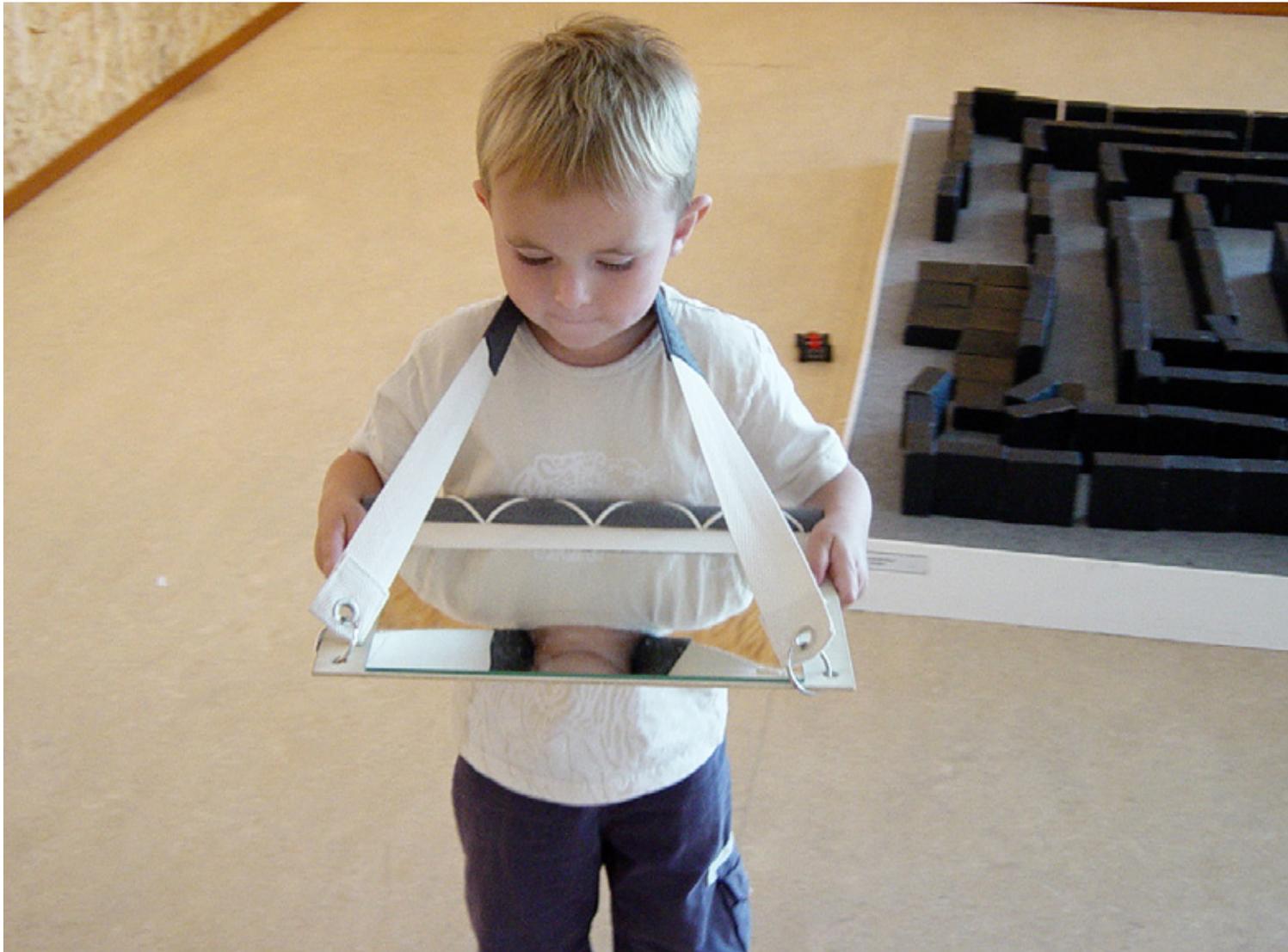
the house like that, I spent hours at interesting places like the wall above the door opening, which suddenly turned into a very large obstacle I could barely climb over. Or the place where I knew the stairs began: the ceiling, which now was the floor to me, showed no sign of the stairs. Later, I used this activity for my work 'Walk on the ceiling'.

I discovered at a very young age that I could choose from different views. Being a dreamy child, I used this merely as a way to linger in an enchanting world, but I felt a certain power realizing I could manipulate my brain into different options. I even started to train myself to use these various options.



INSTRUCTION DRAWING 'WALK ON THE CEILING'  
(VAN DEN BERG, 2005)

## 1.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION



VISITOR USING A MIRROR TO WALK ON THE CEILING.  
(VAN DEN BERG, 2005)

## 1.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Following my fascination for views and behavior, I studied behavioral science. I did not realize that my preference for 'imagining' and 'seeing various options' could be of importance in another way than for my own pleasure. Let's compare this blindness to the way I cleaned toilets for years in cleaning jobs; I cleaned them exactly to the edge of the water surface; I did not see the part below the water surface.

Towards the end of my study, I worked as a trainer for one of my teachers. We were comparing different kinds of behavioral therapy for patients with social anxiety: REBT and skills therapy. REBT is developed by Albert Ellis between 1956 and 2007 (Ellis, 1995) and stands for Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy. The basic idea of the theory of Ellis is that people are often emotionally affected through their thinking about certain events, and not directly by the event itself. By challenging the thoughts someone has about a certain event, people are invited to change their thoughts. We challenged depressing thoughts mainly by using two different questions.

First, the patient described an event and his thoughts. For example: 'All my colleagues think that I am a total failure. I noticed this when I entered the office yesterday.' This is already a mixture of an event and thoughts. Then, REBT asks the patient to describe the event objectively. This is put in a model that distinguishes facts from assumptions and feelings.

When facts and assumptions were untwined, we came up with our two questions: 'How do you know for sure that it is the way you think it is?' (for example: 'How do you know for sure that your colleagues all think you

are a total failure? Did they tell you what they were thinking? ') And: 'What other possibilities could there be in this situation?' (for example: 'Did they hear you? What other thoughts could your colleagues have had about you in this situation?')

During this kind of therapy, patients learned to ask these questions themselves. Almost always they could not know for sure what others were thinking. And almost always there were multiple possibilities. These more rational beliefs made them less anxious or depressed.

Helping people using this therapy was a big eyeopener to me. Realizing that the view you are currently using is just one way to see things, and imagining what other possibilities there could be, this was exactly what I had been practising all my life! I finally saw the importance of my imagination and of practicing various ways to see things. It can encourage people to free themselves from limiting thoughts, like the patients with social anxiety. On top of that, going into different ways to see things can help you to understand others. It changes society when people are interested in the views of other people, when people are really curious about different ideas, backgrounds, opinions, possibilities. When (years later) I started to work as an artist and as an educator, I implemented this 'various views' method in my projects - it became one of my most important beliefs and it still is.

Seeing the psychological advantages of challenging beliefs and seeing various possibilities, does that make me an aid worker? Is my work meant to help people? As far as I'm concerned, it's no longer important where

HOW DO YOU KNOW FOR  
SURE THAT IT IS THE WAY  
YOU THINK IT IS?

WHAT OTHER POSSIBILITIES  
COULD THERE BE?

## 1.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

my activities belong; whether they are art, education, training, behavioral, philosophical, therapeutical or something else. Working as an artist is a way to include everything I want to include. There are no fixed boundaries about what art should be or should not be.

How is my fascination for various views reflected in my work? And what does my work look like, being a mixture of 'art, education, training, sociology, philosophy, therapy or something else'? Which questions or developments have led to this research?

In the next subchapter I will go into my position and practices, using two examples of my work. First, in 1.2 my practice as Judith van den Berg is exemplified. In 1.3, I will go into one of the projects that I co-developed with a colleague as 'Superduo'.

## 1.2 PRACTICE: JUDITH VAN DEN BERG

While being with friends or family, while walking outside, while reading, while doing whatever, I'm taking things with me that influence my work. The length of eye contacts between strangers who are passing each other. Small objects that have occupied a place in public space. The position of someone's head when listening. Confusing signposts. Spaces that remind me of other spaces. A certain color that seems to dominate a certain day. The pattern of walking in a museum. The amount

of space someone takes up. The sound of a question in different languages. Observations can be collected as photographs, memories, writings or as physical collections.

Works as Judith van den Berg start with me being intrigued by something. This is often something out of my collected observations. A place, a public, a situation. Usually I approach the stakeholders of such a situation



OBSERVATION  
(VAN DEN BERG, 2012)

myself, to discuss my ideas with them and to work towards a possible artwork on location. This situation can be cultural or non-cultural, private or public.

### **BEING INTRIGUED, AN EXAMPLE**

I am a frequent visitor of the Middelheimmuseum. This museum is a big park in Antwerp (Belgium), which is accessible for free. It is filled with sculptures. The Middelheimmuseum enchanted me for some years without really thinking about it. I collected every moment there as a dear memory. The sculpture park once was part of a medieval castle with land. You can feel and see that this place has a long history. There is a castle, and water with several bridges. Majestic trees are spread all over the park. Wonderful lawns invite you to admire them, or to sit down on them. Old and new sculptures are mixed, and a lot of sculptures have been made especially for the museum. The park itself, the size, the trees, paths and waters make it quiet and serene.

When thinking about this enchantment, I realized that the magic appears when people are added. They wander quietly between the sculptures, cycle through the park, play on the grass, do their job as a guard or make a daily round with their dog. To me, the people in this park seem to be an essential part of the museum. They merge with the park and add energy and versatility.



TWO FIGURES FOR MIDDELHEIM  
MUNOZ (1993)



MIDDELHEIMMUSEUM ANTWERP  
(VISITOR IN SCULPTURE STORAGE)

## 1.2 PRACTICE: JUDITH VAN DEN BERG

Once I realised the importance of the people in this park, I wondered how these people see the park. Do they look at each other? How do they see their own presence in this museum? I started to collect my observations in a more targeted way. This led to ideas for an intervention that included the role and behavior of the public.

Conversations with the museum curator, with visitors of the museum and with museum staff moulded my ideas. I noticed certain categories of people visiting the museum, either visiting it as museum, or as park, or as part of their route from A to B. Parents with children, walking people, cyclists, people in groups, people walking their dogs. People with umbrellas, with beards, wearing glasses, people presenting themselves as male or female. In order to refer to these visitors as indispensable elements of the museum, I decided to transform them into artworks. Not a transformation into stationary figures, but a transformation into moving, living artworks, without any change in behavior.

### THE DAY I BECAME A WORK OF ART

*'Hello sir, madam, today is a very special day in the Middelheim Museum. It is THE DAY I BECAME A WORK OF ART. Shall I tell you something more about this art project?'*

THE DAY I BECAME A WORK OF ART took place during 3 weekends in 2017. Visitors and staff of the museum were approached at the entrances of the museum.

They were asked to choose a title for themselves (available in dutch and english).

Those titles were depicted on small metal plates, much

like the title signs of the sculptures in the museum.

Titles were simple and objective, often derived from frequently used titles of artworks. Each title had a number, which made each visitor a unique work of art. There was, for example, only one 'Figure, seen on back no.487'. Visitors were allowed to keep the signs. The title that was chosen by them could be a title for life.

Like this work, most of my works are site specific. Doing site specific interventions gives me the opportunity to involve people that are in a situation they know. Their familiar relation to the situation - what do they usually experience here, what do they feel is meant to happen normally, what is their role in this situation, what others do they think belong here - is directly affected.

### DISARRANGE

In this work, what you normally experience in this museum is all still there. But it is supplemented with new elements that could cause new observations, sensations, thoughts or views. These new elements, titles for visitors, were accompanied by an extensive staff that guided the visitors in a friendly way.

After some possibly confusing experiences (being approached by strangers, being asked to participate, offered titles out of which you are asked to make a choice), you walk around with a title, and you see others who wear a title too. What does that do to a participant? And what happens after this day? This project provided me with a lot of reactions. Because I was there during the project, because someone sent me a reaction, and because reactions were captured in film and photographs. What did I notice, and what struck me?

Most visitors made a careful consideration to select a

title that matched them. Sometimes they even came back to switch their title. A 'Mother with child' came back to transform into 'Female figure', explaining that she felt limited by the title 'Mother with child'. Special numbers were also requested a lot. It seems like the project made people think about themselves. What title would fit them? In this moment, or as a representative for their whole person? Which names or numbers had a special meaning to them? Reflecting on your personality, role, behaviour, function, relation to others and life could be a result of every category I mentioned before: art, education, training, sociology, philosophy or therapy.

A visitor who emailed me impressed me by musing on the meaning of a work of art, and on being a visitor. He wore his title to work the next day. See his translated email on the next page.



KIND MET MOEDER NR.46  
 (CHILD WITH MOTHER NO.46)  
 (VAN DEN BERG, 2017)

'HI JUDITH,

ONE OF YOUR WORKS OF ART IS SPEAKING: UNTITLED NO. 20.

IT IS AFTER VISITING YOUR WEBSITE THAT I REALIZE THAT I HAVE RECEIVED THIS TITLE FROM JUDITH HERSELF. I DID NOT KNOW YOU AND YOUR PREVIOUS WORK, BUT THIS NICE INITIATIVE AND THE IDEA THAT LIES AT THE BASIS OF YOUR PROJECT FASCINATES ME VERY MUCH. I HAVE ALSO ENJOYED OTHER PROJECTS FEATURED ON YOUR WEBSITE.

IT'S NICE TO EXPERIENCE THE FEELING OF BEING A WORK OF ART YOURSELF. A WORK OF ART ONLY ACQUIRES MEANING IF THE VIEWER GIVES IT A MEANING. THE VIEWER ONLY GAINS MEANING WHEN THE WORK OF ART BEHOLDS HIM. ONE CANNOT EXIST WITHOUT THE OTHER, WE DEPEND ON EACH OTHER TO CREATE MEANING. AND I WORE THE METAL PLATE TO WORK TODAY AND PROPAGATED THE IDEA. THIS ELICITED STRANGE REACTIONS FROM SOME, BUT OTHERS WERE STIMULATED BY THE IDEA. IT WAS FUN, IT STILL IS FUN AND IT WILL CONTINUE TO BE FUN. IN SHORT, A SUCCESSFUL 'PROJECT' TO ME.

UNTITLED NO.20'

## 1.2 PRACTICE: JUDITH VAN DEN BERG



FIGUUR, OP DE RUG GEZIEN NR.30  
 (FIGURE, SEEN ON BACK NO.30)  
 (VAN DEN BERG, 2017)



FEMALE FIGURE NO.36  
 (VAN DEN BERG, 2017)

My work usually functions as a subtle invite to take part in an experiment. If someone accepts the invite to participate, that makes me the instigator of a process, that's all. What happens after accepting the invite is a private process between a participant and the work. I feel that I should back off there - the last thing I want to do is influence this experience.

### **TITLES, ROLES, INSTITUTIONS**

Offering a title, a role or introducing a new institution are often part of my instruments to give weight to imagination and possible new views. These new views could drift by and disappear without you noticing them. A touch of officiality can make you aware of what happens, and can encourage you to take your imagination and these new views seriously. Next to giving weight, this official touch can also bring a feeling of safety. A foothold in unknown territory, and an entrance to belonging to a new group. In this work: visitors wearing a title.

Besides making participants aware of what happens, institutions, roles, and titles also play with authority. Authority is only existing because we decided all together about it. It deserves to be questioned all the time. Do we still need certain kinds of authority? Do we agree on what we once decided? Is power validated by uniforms, titles, signs, important names? What happens if we use titles, important names, institutions and uniforms apart from existing authority?

### **A CURIOUS STATE**

I hope to contribute to the emergence of a curious state. The way I do that is intuitively chosen, and is different in each work. By mildly disarranging a well-

known situation, by bringing people just 'off balance', there could be a possible opening for curiosity to sneak in. I feel that a curious state is helping to be open towards new experiences and various views.

This is confirmed by psychologists. In chapter 3 I will deepen the literature on the topic of curiosity and its effects, but to look ahead already to one of the effects on social relations: 'Less curious people rely on stereotypes to describe others and find new information that is inconsistent with these beliefs to be threatening.' (Kashdan, 2010, p. 42) When I transform this into a positively formulated sentence, that would mean that being curious helps to question stereotypes, and can make people more receptive for new information. This sentence feels like one of the goals of my work. I like to create space in which curiosity could occur. I like to create space in which curiosity can arise. Other views and new experiences are then within reach for those who want to try them.



VISITORS WITH VARIOUS TITLES  
(VAN DEN BERG, 2017)

## 1.3 PRACTICE: SUPERDUO

10 years ago, I started to collaborate with a colleague, next to my individual projects. This colleague is Genevieve Kooijman. She works as graphic designer and as voice coach. Our collaboration, Superduo, designs projects for clients like municipalities, festivals and cultural institutions.

Superduo projects are playful concepts that seduce participants to experiment. We want to tackle the anxiety to fail, give room for doubt, and encourage to explore freely. The participants are brought by the client.

The senses and the doing already had a role in my own projects. Superduo projects increased the role of the senses and the doing. Inducing a physical curiosity is often part of the exploring assignments we design, when possible interactive. See for example the images below, where two strangers are instructed to borrow each others hand during a drawing activity.

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SUPERDUO WORK

Superduo projects always start with the question of a client: a certain theme should be experienced and explored by the participants of a certain event. The presence of the participants to the event is mostly



ASSIGNMENT 'CAN I BORROW YOUR HAND?'  
DE WIJ-KUNNEN-OOK-NIET-TEKENEN-CLUB  
(SUPERDUO, 2014)

voluntary, and participation in the activity we design is in these situations also voluntary.

We chew on the question, we connect the client's theme to our personal memories, we challenge our own assumptions, we gather other views on the theme, we try to widen our view and develop a plan for an activity. The activity we design allows the participants to experiment together in some way, to look at the theme from different sides and from different points of view.

In this example I will use the question of a sub-organization of the city of Rotterdam. This organization is called 'Rotterdams Weerwoord' ('Weerwoord': 'counter-argument' and 'weatherword'). Rotterdams Weerwoord wants to connect people that are actively involved in climate problems. These people could be working on climate issues full-time, or could be connected to these issues more indirect. Twice a year they organize a symposium-like event. In the spring of 2022 they asked us to design an activity during the entrance of participants. This symposium was called 'From dreaming big to doing big'. The activity should center around climate issues and should encourage contact between participants.

We decided to guide participants into dreaming, imagining, and meeting. A playful activity allowed the public to imagine and depict their dreams about climate issues.

Meanwhile, attention was payed to the transition from the situation where participants were in just before, to being present at this symposium.

The activity generated a natural way of getting to know eachother and working together. The title of the activity was 'indromen', dutch for 'dream-in'.

We walked around, dressed in a silver cape with a pink cloud on it. We started short conversations with the participants. Our approach addressed the particular moment the participants were in, having just entered the situation of the symposium. We aimed to achieve a mixed experience: to make participants feel at ease and at the same time mention the tension that can be there when others/situations are (partly) unknown, or when things are expected of you. Our voices promised participants safety and a personal guidance. But because we were talking through microphones, every participant could hear these 'private' conversations.

After a short conversation we asked the participants to take part in an activity called 'pass on drawing'. We gave them a sheet of paper. Each sheet had a composed word as a drawing command. This word was connected to water, heat, the future, energy, people, nature, cities, countries; a wide range of 'climate words'.

A few examples of the composed words:

Splashtree  
Headfish  
Airchair  
Spongesheep  
Dreamditch  
Shadowshop

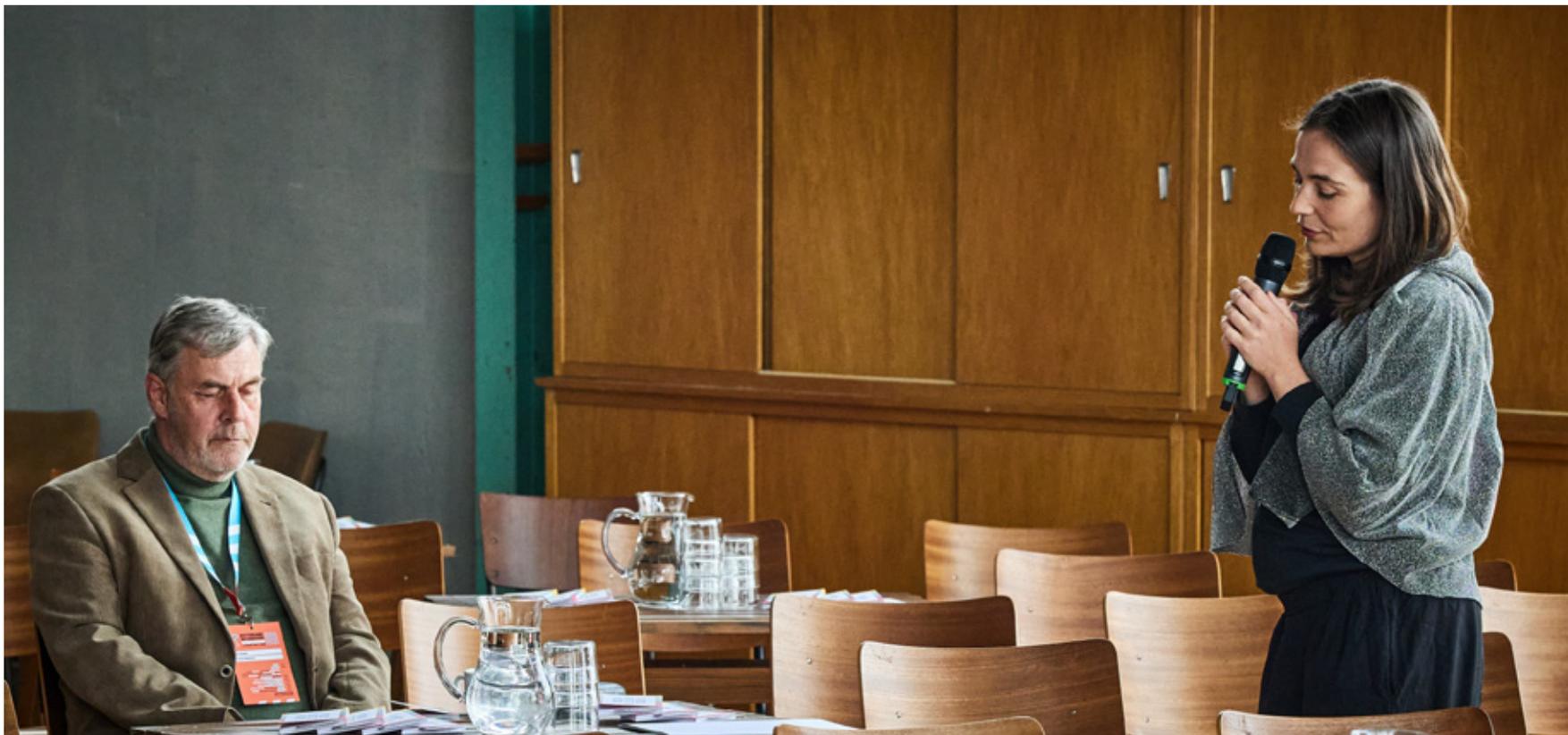
A small explanation about the 'pass on drawing'

## 1.3 PRACTICE: SUPERDUO



was given on the spot, that explanation was also summarized on the sheet. Most people have made such a shared drawing at one time or another in their lives and recognized the idea.

INDROMEN ('DREAM-IN')  
(SUPERDUO, 2022)



HAS IT BEEN A BUSY DAY  
SO FAR? DID YOU HAVE TO  
HURRY TO GET HERE ON  
TIME?

I CAN GUIDE YOU INTO BEING  
PRESENT HERE. CLOSE YOUR  
EYES, AND LISTEN TO MY  
VOICE

FRAGMENT OF QUESTIONS AND GUIDING TEXTS

INDROMEN (DREAM-IN) AT SYMPOSIUM ROTTERDAMS

WEERWOORD (SUPERDUO - 2022)

A 'pass on drawing' works like this: the sheet is divided in 3 parts, with lines or folds. The 1st person draws something on the top piece and extends the lines of the drawing to just past the border of the top piece. (connection points) This person folds the sheet and passes it on. The 2nd person continues the drawing of the 1st person, using the connection points as a start. The 2nd person does not see what the 1st person has drawn. Then the sheet is folded again, and the 3rd person continues with the connection points of the 2nd piece. Together they form a surprising creation.

How do the projects of Superduo relate to the projects of Judith van den Berg? Most elements that are important to the projects of Judith van den Berg are also important to the projects of Superduo.

### **VARIOUS VIEWS**

Projects invite a public to see and explore different views, especially when these views are possibly uncomfortable.

### **PLAY WITH OFFICIALITY / AUTHORITY**

'Make it official' is often a way to give a powerful presence to a project as a way to provide some sense of safety. The experimental activity gets a role in society. It presents itself as existing, important, and open to people who connect to what happens there. Dream-in introduces a new activity, with a logo and a shiny, dreamy presence. Participants are seduced to enter this unknown activity - which almost seems like a cult with its meditative elements and leader-like presenters. Next to the activity itself, unknown words are introduced. Participants are invited to give these words an existence by depicting them. Playing with authority-related

issues like imposing certain roles on participants is recognizable in both 'Judith van den Berg projects' and 'Superduo projects'.

### **SEDUCE AND DISARRANGE**

Work together with a stranger, imagine a shape, draw a line that belongs to a word you never heard, tell the personal story of your day through a microphone. These are activities that could be uneasy for participants. Social dangers can be felt, like the possibility of being rejected by others. We think it is important to realize that these feelings exist, to endure them in some way. At the same time, we do not want to scare participants away. Uneasiness and safety are mixed: participants are lead into a situation of mild disarrangement, which is disguised as an attractive safe place.

### **QUESTION**

Once inside the activity, you are being questioned. 'Do you want to participate? Where did you just come from? Is this a busy day for you?' But the real questions are often not posed by our words, but through engaging in the activity.

Do you feel a slight resistance to participate in this activity? What is your usual way to handle unknown situations? Why is that? What is your attitude towards the others that are present? Would you be okay to work with people you don't know in this activity? Do you allow yourself to daydream about heavy problems like climate issues? Do you allow others to do that? Are you willing to try out another perspective? Are you aware of the tension you feel right now? Can you accept it as part of your life?

These questions can be seen as a challenging dialogue between a participant and our work. Or sometimes as an internal dialogue inside a participant. Next to that, we always aim for a dialogue between participants. Participants sense that they are in a non-threatening but still slightly disturbing situation. Others, although often unknown to them, quickly become safe companions. When sharing words or participating together in an activity, dialogues with others can easily lead to new perspectives.

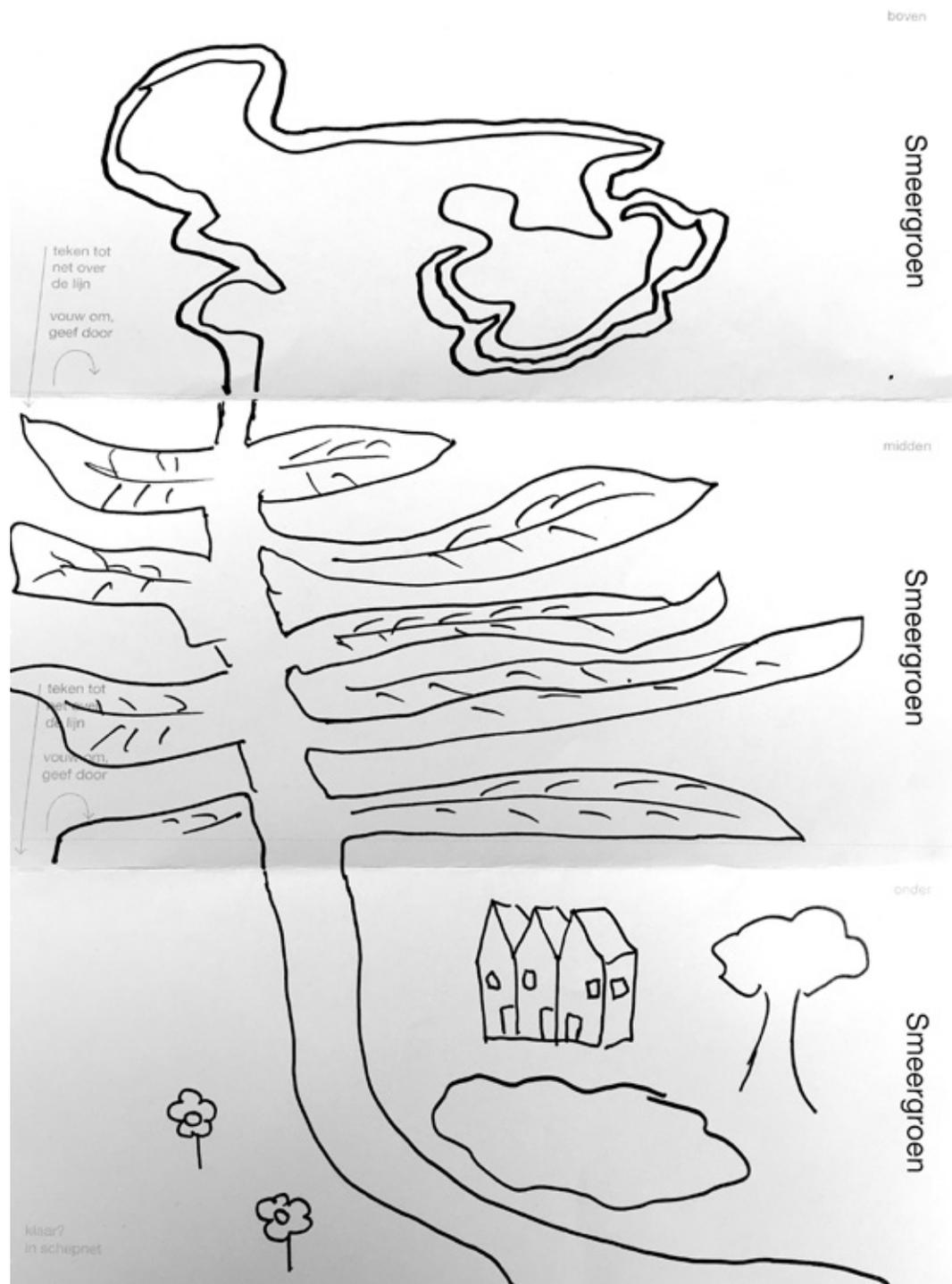
As in projects of Judith van den Berg, these elements (inviting to various views, play with officiality/authority, seduce and disarrange, question) could trigger the emergence of the curious state. Arousing a curious state might help to tackle anxiety to fail, to feel the space to doubt, and to explore freely. This curious state is also favorable for the clients of Superduo: the theme that should be experienced and explored gets a real chance to be experienced and explored. I realize that in both practices I strive to create situations that welcome curiosity.

## 1.3 PRACTICE AND POSITION : SUPERDUO



INDROMEN ('DREAM-IN')  
(SUPERDUO, 2022)

## 1.3 PRACTICE AND POSITION: SUPERDUO



SMEERGROEN (SMEARGREEN)

PASS ON DRAWING

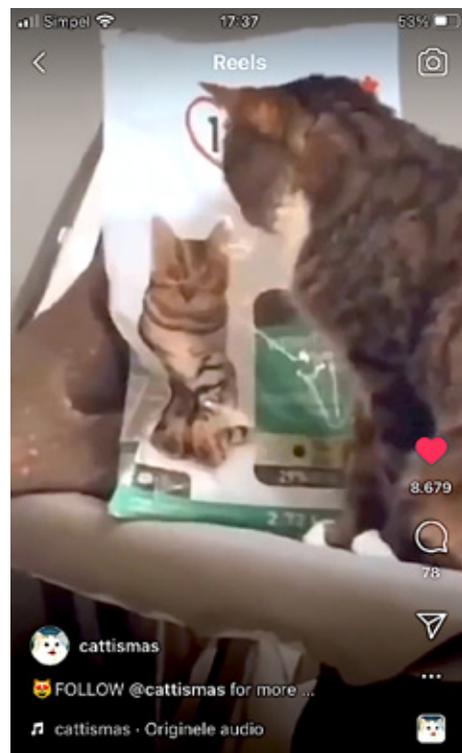
INDROMEN ('DREAM-IN')

(SUPERDUO, 2022)

## **2. RESEARCH DESCRIPTION**

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## 2.1 CURIOSITY AND SITUATION



CAT TOUCHING THE IMAGE OF A CAT ON A BAG  
(CATTISMAS, 2021)

A STRONG DESIRE TO  
PURSUE SOMETHING WHICH  
IS PARTLY NEW, UNKNOWN,  
OR UNPREDICTABLE

After realizing that I want to create situations that welcome curiosity, the next question would be 'which situations welcome curiosity?' My practices seem to do this in an intuitive way. The reasons for a certain choice are not thought through but felt through. While cherishing this approach, I would like to add theory, thoughts, views, and test situations. What are the beliefs around curiosity? Do others also think curiosity is important? What do others say about situations that welcome curiosity? And about elements that can block the entrance of curiosity? Others: experts from various disciplines like psychologists, artists, educators, brain scientists, but also non-experts, random people. My questions concern the way curiosity can be seen and used by 'people in general'. Therefore I like to include the views and theories of experts and non-experts. When aiming for a question as 'In which situations does curiosity feel welcome', how to describe 'curiosity' and 'situation'?

### **CURIOSITY**

For the time being I propose to use this definition: 'A strong desire to pursue something which is partly new, unknown, or unpredictable. Being curious often leads to exploration and inquisitive thinking.' This definition is a mix of existing definitions that I kneaded into a sentence I agreed with.

The desire to pursue something partly new, unknown or unpredictable can be directed towards every kind of knowledge or experience. For example, the problem being pursued may involve gaining knowledge from a book, asking a question, or experiencing something in a physical way. Thoughts can be part of the process of pursuing, but are not required. What makes an

experience a curious mission is when we feel like we're on the hunt for what is different, for what is unknown.

Note that curiosity can include awareness on what is being desired, but this is not a necessity. There can be an urge to know or experience something, without being aware of it being a pursued desire.

Being curious can feel very active. If we look at part of the definition, the 'strong desire to pursue something' can lead to very active behaviour. But the step before that, getting curious, seems to be a passive thing. Like falling asleep, or falling in love, we seem to fall in a curious state. The word 'falling' in falling asleep/in love already indicates the passive character it can have. We can not force the sleep to fall on us, or force ourselves to fall in love.

We can use some techniques that might help us relax and prepare for a sleep-mode. We can exercise regularly, limit or ban alcohol and stress from our lives, and lower our breathing frequency (Jerath, Beveridge and Barnes, 2019, pp. 2-4). Next to the actions mentioned above, we could also close the curtains, shut of computers and phones, avoid being close to loud noises, change the light circumstances, and find a soft place with the right temperature to rest. We welcome sleep through adjusting the situation. What are the situations that curiosity likes to live in? How can we welcome curiosity?

### **SITUATION**

Analogous to theories of anxiety, curiosity can be seen as trait curiosity (part of your personal characteristics), and as state curiosity (dependent on the situation).

Curiosity as a trait is universal, and is malleable: we are able to develop this trait (Kashdan 2010, p. 39). When getting curious, it is hard to distinguish between trait/state origin, and it will usually be a mix: someone is getting curious because of the way his/her trait has developed, and because of the particular situation. In designing my experiments, I focussed on state curiosity: curiosity that arises as a result of a certain situation.

The concept 'situation' can be described in a strict sense as related to 'location'. In a wider sense it refers to everything that happens or is present at a certain time and place. This wider sense is not specifically meant to be about people. I will reflect on situations which are partly created by me for a group of participants. These situations are co-created by the personal circumstances of participants at that moment, and the circumstances of that moment in general. For this thesis I would like to edit the definition of 'situation' by Oxford languages: 'a set of circumstances in which one finds oneself'. I will work with 'A set of circumstances experienced by a particular person or group.' This definition allows the influence of personal characteristics around curiosity on a situation.

In subchapters 2.2 and 2.3 I will explain the structure of this thesis and of my research, and the choices I made.

## 2.2 STRUCTURE AND QUESTIONS

### STRUCTURE OF RESEARCH

In this thesis, my research is reflected in three entangled structures: a search in words, images and experiments. These structures will be further explained in subchapter 2.3.

### PEDAGOGICAL OR CULTURAL?

Before going into details, I would like to clarify my point of view. Working as an artist and as an educator, you might wonder if I look at curiosity from a pedagogical point of view, or from a cultural point of view.

What is culture in this discussion around my thesis on curiosity? What is pedagogy in this discussion? My mind tries to translate these abstract words into a more specific, tangible description.

‘Cultural’ I would translate as ‘behavior that feels as belonging to a group’. Focusing on curiosity, ‘cultural’ would mean the way people see and use curiosity in different groups. It seems that older people tend to see curiosity about certain topics as intrusive (Dokman, 2021). Or it can be seen as nosy (Nieuwsgierig Aagje, dutch expression that will be further discussed in 3.3) or as dangerous (Curiosity killed the cat, english expression that will also be further discussed in 3.3). In american, british and dutch scientific theories which discuss research on curiosity, it is mainly a desirable state that is highly valued.

‘Pedagogical’, that would mean something like that it is meant to bring new thoughts, knowledge or skills to others. When asking people about the way they see and use curiosity, this could be pedagogical. For instance, when my aim is to make people aware of their curiosity

because I think this is of value to them.

Choosing between culture and pedagogy is impossible to me. These words are both very present in my work and are totally merged. My work is an attempt to grasp ideas, to understand what they mean. I design questioning works and activities that make people experiment, in the mind or by doing. I think that the situation in which I did my research defines if you could call it merely pedagogical or cultural.

The experiments at the Kinderfaculteit Pendrecht took place in a pedagogical setting. Their goal is to help children to enrich their world, to empower perseverance and to be more curious. My activities were offered as ‘lessons’ by the Kinderfaculteit Pendrecht. At the same time, the way we worked is cultural, because we go into habits of groups and individuals. We question each other on how you see curiosity and behavior/activities that are related to it, like coincidence, doubt, questions.

I did not choose a clear role as an educator or as an artist (or as whatever role). Here, I like to refer to Mieke Bal who talks about the doing. *‘Call it a practice and say how you do it, then others can see if they want to do it the same way’* (Lutters and Bal, 2018, p.112). I would like to add ‘It is a practice, I hope it questions you to think about how you see things, and inspires you to do things in various ways’.

### SITUATION FOR EXPERIMENTS

In May 2021 I came into contact with the ‘Kinderfaculteit Pendrecht (Pendrecht Childrens Faculty)’. I will refer to this institute as ‘KFP’. KFP is an organization that offers

## 2.2 STRUCTURE AND QUESTIONS

challenging lessons for children (4-12 years old) in leisure time. Their program is related to school subjects and leisure time activities; children can for example work on their reading skills, learn to cook or play chess. The overall goal is to invite children to learn something, so we can call it an educational institute.

Pendrecht is an area of Rotterdam. The area was built around 1949. Fifty years later the neighborhood started to impoverish. A major restructuring has been going on for years to make the neighborhood more attractive (Pendrecht, n.d.). Pendrecht is a multicultural area. Children have various backgrounds (religion, language of parents). All children that participate in the KFP programm go to one of the four Primary Schools in Pendrecht. When subscribing for lessons at the KFP, the children are expected to be present physically and mentally. When not present, parents are called. Children seem to be very enthusiast about the lessons at the KFP. Some children attend 3 different lessons a week.

The KFP seemed to be a very appropriate environment in which to apply my research. KFP has three goals: enrich children's worlds, empower perseverance, and stimulate curiosity. The organization of KFP had been wondering how to describe and define their last goal, 'Stimulate curiosity'. They just started to work this out when I spoke to them in May 2021. In the words of the project manager KFP, Jiska Peteroff: 'In my view, curiosity is something that is innate, but can disappear over the years. For example, due to little challenge, no satisfaction of curiosity, so that learning motivation decreases. Precisely by continuing to stimulate children to ask questions themselves and by offering them the

opportunity to arrive at answers, curiosity and therefore motivation are maintained. Can curiosity be mapped? Can we determine a definition together? What are incentives that can enhance curiosity?' (Peteroff, 2021)

These practical questions, 'Can we determine a definition together? What are incentives that can enhance curiosity?' were related to my own questions. I was happy with the opportunity to contribute to their exploration. Other appealing agreements were the fact that I could do whatever I wanted, there were no fixed questions or wanted outcomes, the fact that I could start very quickly, just a few months later in October 2021, and the fact that they would pay me the same as the other teachers who offered lessons.

The first question of the KFP (can we determine a definition together) is explored with the participants. The findings contribute to the theories and views on curiosity in this thesis. The second question, 'What are incentives that can enhance curiosity?', is seen from my perspective as creator of the testsituations. It is included in my focus on how to create a situation in which curiosity feels welcome (state curiosity), and less directly on factors that influence the development of curiosity in individuals (trait curiosity).

Participants would be experiencing and exploring curiosity through the created situations. At the same time they would explore curiosity as a subject: how to define it, which factors are related, what are it's qualities, how is it related to danger. Most researchers of curiosity distinguish between different kinds of curiosity. Research with children is often focussed on 'epistemic curiosity': the desire to seek and acquire

new intellectual information. The approach I take in this thesis is directly derived from my description of curiosity: A strong desire to pursue something which is partly new, unknown, or unpredictable. Curiosity is seen as a desire that can target itself to any new, unknown or unpredictable 'something', and that can be explored in any way. This connects to my idea of learning. Learning can happen through any experience and at any age, and need not be related only to formal educational settings and subjects.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION**

The main research question is:

How can situations be created (at the KFP, with children aged 8 -10) in which curiosity feels welcome?

Subquestions being:

- Which theories and views exist on the positive/negative effects of curiosity?
- In which situations does curiosity feel welcome?
- What can block the entrance of curiosity?
- What is the effect of the experiments at the KFP on the participants?

## 2.3 METHODS

### METHODS: SEARCH IN WORDS

Reading texts, talking to people and thinking are mainly done with words.

#### • Texts

Curiosity is well-researched by psychologists. That matched my preference for texts on behaviour very well. A lot of the texts I read are scientific articles about research on curiosity, written by psychologists. I selected texts on the advantages of curiosity, the way curiosity is seen, texts on what can block the entrance of curiosity, and texts on situations that can welcome curiosity. I read some texts on art and education, and a book about grooves in the life of the writer. I did some searches on the internet to help me describe concepts.

#### • Talk to people: acquaintances

During this research, I started talking about it to everyone around me. Friends, family, colleagues. The process of reading, talking and thinking raised questions on how others see curiosity and when they experience it/don't experience it. I interviewed some of my friends, family and colleagues.

Doke Dokman is a retired psychoanalyst. She is a curious person with a sharp insight on behavior. Next to that, she is a representative of an age group that has mixed feelings towards curiosity. I interviewed her on curiosity and the things you should not be curious about. This interview had the form of a conversation. (Dokman, 2021)

Yvonne van den Herik is an artist and a very curious person. I spoke to her in a group conversation of artists. She mentioned that her curiosity is not always well-received. I interviewed her online on

how others experience her curiosity. This interview had the form of a conversation. (Van den Herik, 2022)

Martine Herman is an artist, designer of gardens, and coordinator/advisor for art projects. She reacted to an invitation that I posted on LinkedIn, to take part in an activity regarding curiosity. During a guided walk, we did some experiments related to her habits, fears and curiosity. (Herman, 2022)

I interviewed my colleagues and my supervisors at the Master Education in Arts on habits. These interviews were notes with a question. The notes came back with written answers. One of these notes is used in subchapter 3.5 (Colleagues and supervisors, 2022)

#### • Talk to people: people in general

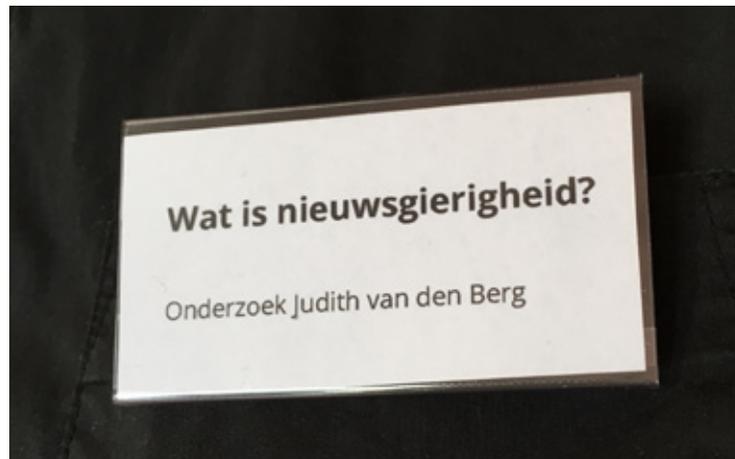
I also decided to interview some 'people in general'. Everyone has an understanding of curiosity, although the understanding differs, and it might be hard to describe it. I was interested in what 'people in general' would think of curiosity. These interviews functioned as the beginning of my research.

During these interviews I wore a badge, see the image on the next page. As can be seen in the highlighted text on page 38, asking people about curiosity this way turned out to be a situation which was welcoming for curiosity.

In the public space of Rotterdam (various areas) I spoke to 6 'people in general'. The 6 people I

interviewed were of different ages, and were present in different parts of public space in Rotterdam. They were all sitting or standing, not in a hurry to go somewhere. The sound of the interviews was recorded. Questions were:

- How would you describe curiosity?
  - How do you notice that you are curious? How does it feel?
  - Is curiosity always positive or can it also be negative?
- (People in general, 2021)



BADGE USED FOR INTERVIEWS IN PUBLIC SPACE WITH 'PEOPLE IN GENERAL' 'WHAT IS CURIOSITY?' (VAN DEN BERG, 2021)



YES, I AM CURIOUS  
SOMETIMES. I AM VERY  
CURIOUS ABOUT THIS  
CONVERSATION RIGHT NOW!

'ARE YOU CURIOUS AT TIMES?'

FRAGMENT OF INTERVIEW

PEOPLE IN GENERAL

2021

- **Talk to people: professional experts**

While everyone can be seen as an expert on curiosity, some experts work in fields related to curiosity. I interviewed some experts, and will name the ones that are used in this thesis.

Remko van der Drift is a 'professor in failing'. I have been following his work for years because I felt my practice was somehow related to it. I interviewed him online to hear his view on the relation between failure and curiosity. This interview had the form of an online conversation. The conversation was recorded. (Van der Drift, 2022)

Bas Haring is a philosopher and researcher of curiosity (among other things). He is professor 'public understanding of science'. He has a great skill translating philosophical questions into daily situations, and daily situations into philosophical questions. I asked him about his view on the importance of curiosity by email. (Haring, 2022)

Marije Nie is a professional tapdancer and a researcher of the unknown. She has been working with other researchers/artists in a group called 'Embracing the Unknown'. I interviewed her on her view on curiosity and the unknown during an informal conversation. (Nie, 2022 and 2023)

Danae Bodewes is a researcher at Fontys Hogescholen. She explores and stimulates a curious attitude. I interviewed her online on her thoughts on curiosity and how to influence it. The interview was recorded. (Bodewes, 2021)

Marieke van Dam is a designer of curious activities. Her work is focussed on a curious approach of daily life, by using small playful challenges. I interviewed her online about her work as playcoach and her view on curiosity. The conversation was recorded. (Van Dam, 2021)

Martijn Engelbregt is an artist and a designer of friendly/provoking events. I interviewed him in person about the role of curiosity in his work. The sound of the interview was recorded. (Engelbregt, 2022)

Tim Post is a psychologist and a researcher of curiosity. He sees curiosity as an attitude you can develop. I interviewed him by email about his thoughts on developing a curious attitude. (Post, 2022)

- **Talk to people: participants of the experiments**

After finishing the experiments, 4 participants were interviewed by me in their house. The parents of all 7 participants were asked to cooperate, but not all of them reacted. These interviews took place six months after the end of the experiments. The sound of the interviews was recorded. I asked them about their reflection on the experiments. (Participants Studio Superkracht, 2022)

### **METHODS: SEARCH IN HIGHLIGHTS AND IMAGES**

I selected images and words for highlights for this thesis. The origins of these words and images are diverse:

the studied texts  
interviews  
my thoughts  
daily life  
the experiments (both materials used in the experiments, and images of the experiments)  
my practices

Reasons to include images or words in highlights were for instance that they impressed me by their clarity, beauty or expressiveness. Another reason to highlight words or to include an image was to stress out the importance of this image or sentence. Some highlights or images are added to help explain something. Highlights and images connect to the texts and have a stand alone quality.

### **METHODS: SEARCH IN EXPERIMENTS**

#### **• Choice of structure of the activities**

The format of the KFP is to offer lessons in a series of 10. I proposed a series on curiosity for- and with children, which the KFP welcomed immediately. I intended to contribute to the questions of the KFP in a playful way, by exploring curiosity together with children. This resulted in a series of 10 lessons of 1,5 hours each, in October, November and December 2021. Within these series I decided for a structure that grew organically from lesson to lesson. The findings and stories of the children in one lesson led to the structure

and subject of the next lesson. Each situation had its own specific elements that contribute to the general research question about welcoming situations.

#### **• Choice of structure of the whole series**

All activities were part of a research institute: 'Studio Superkracht (Studio Superpower)'. This Studio was new and unknown to the participants. 'Studio' refers to a place where things are being tested and where exploration can be done. An institution demands a role in society. Institutions present themselves as existing, important, and open to people who connect to what happens there. The name could indicate that something powerful can happen here, something with superpowers. To add to the official character of the Studio and the research, we used official materials like badges, stickers with the name of the institute, and well-functioning measuring instruments. To me as a researcher, the name Studio Superkracht indicated that I was testing situations through the use of the institute and within it.

#### **• Choice of participants**

The KFP and I decided together that these lessons would function best for children of groups 5, 6, 7 and 8. In these groups the children are 8 – 12 years old. This age group was chosen because I wanted to use forms with simple assignments, so the participating children had to be able to read.

Also, some research suggests that curiosity diminishes starting at the age of 5 or 6, when children start to read and write. (Berger, 2015) While not wanting to test this hypothesis, this possible fact could have consequences for the choice of the age group. Working with a very young age group could mean that the children would

be curious about a lot of things the whole time, as a natural way of being. They would not be able to see curiosity as a concept because it might be present continually. By choosing an age group beyond the point of the possible diminishing of curiosity, I guessed it would be more clear for the participants to distinguish between a 'curious state' and a 'not curious state'. Seven children of 8, 9 and 10 years old applied. They were all sent by teachers or parents. No one had an idea of what was going to happen.

The participating children will be indicated as 'participants'.

#### • **Choice of observations**

I made notes during and after each lesson. During lessons, lots of quotes of the participants seemed very unique, so when possible I took some time to write them down. After the lessons, I wrote down my thoughts and observations. Most thoughts and observations were judging the lesson on the 'enjoy and understand' factors. Did the participants enjoy the lesson? Did they understand the concepts we were working on?

Next to taking notes, I asked the parents of the participating children if I could take photographs for my thesis. They all agreed. These forms of observation were time consuming but very valuable. They showed another layer of the same 'enjoy and understand' factor. Some participants did not talk a lot. The images provided extra info on what participants were doing, what their facial expression and body position were like, which children worked together and in what way.

Two lessons were observed by others: a teacher of one of the schools in the neighbourhood, and a researcher of KFP-financer Verre Bergen (a social fund in Rotterdam).

#### • **Analysis of collected data**

Collected observations, images, and notes of other observers are analysed by the following questions:

- What did I notice? What stood out?
- Were the prepared lessons clear? Did the lessons function in the situation?
- Which elements seem to contribute to a situation that welcomes curiosity?
- Which elements of the activities made the participants enthusiastic? Which elements of the activities made the participants not enthusiastic?

### **3. THEORIES AND VIEWS ON CURIOSITY**

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## 3.1 VARIOUS VIEWS VERSUS CURIOSITY

Before rushing on to curiosity itself, we make a stopover at 'various views'. Various views is what I described earlier as 'Realizing that the view you are currently using is just one way to see things, and imagining what other possibilities there could be' (this thesis, p. 8). While various views is an important element of my practices, and also in Studio Superkracht, how exactly is it related to curiosity?

Various views goes beyond 'perspective taking' as in 'existing perspectives'. It also includes imagination: non-existent perspectives. Not only other possibilities, but also impossibilities. It is difficult to find sources that describe exactly what I mean. What comes close is a combination of changing perspective, psychological flexibility and imagination.

Kashdan (2010, p. 32) tells us that curiosity motivates us to view things from multiple perspectives. These other views might conflict with how we once viewed things or how others view things. When we decide that we need to adapt our existing views, this can be difficult; our previous deeply held beliefs gave us a sense of certainty and clarity. When we are in a curious state of mind, we can tolerate this tension. The other way round, using different perspectives can also awaken curiosity: 'When we embrace the unknown, our perspective changes, and we begin to recognize gaps - literal and figurative - that weren't apparent before.' (Kashdan 2010, p. 27)

More on this interesting issue of 'gaps' is to come in subchapter 3.4.

Psychological flexibility refers to being able to deal with unpleasant thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations at the moment we experience them. (Kasdan 2010, p. 230) I

feel this is related to 'imagining what other possibilities there could be' (this thesis, p. 8)

Various views also includes imagining things. It's not only about existing perspectives or possibilities, but also about non-existent perspectives or made-up stories. Remember Einsteins statement 'Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will get you everywhere.'

A somewhat lesser known statement of Einstein explains this further: 'Knowledge is a map that guides us while imagination is the territory where we can roam freely and search for answers and opportunities. Imagination knows no restraint and it is the power that puts knowledge to use.' (Both Einstein statements: Easybib, n.d.)

In my opinion, 'various views' can be an aspect of curiosity, an effect of curiosity or a cause of curiosity.

CURIOSITY, THAT'S LIKE  
WORLD PEACE. WHO COULD  
BE AGAINST IT?

QUOTE MARTINE HERMAN (ARTPROJECTS ADVISOR AND GARDEN DESIGNER)

INTERVIEW BY JUDITH VAN DEN BERG

2022

## 3.2 WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE SIDES TO CURIOSITY?



PARTICIPANT STUDIO SUPERKRACHT  
WITH SUITCASE

In the lessons of Studio Superkracht, I used a suitcase with a question mark on it. Inside I hid an object that we would need during the lesson. Waiting for the suitcase to be opened induced a happy, exciting kind of curiosity. It excited the participants and made them very enthusiastic to think, do, and work together.

How about curiosity in general, does it always have this effect? Why should curiosity be something we want to contribute to? Luckily, lots of psychologists and sociologists have been researching the positive effects of curiosity. I will shortly mention some of their findings, combined with views of others (distracted from interviews)

### 3.2 WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE SIDES TO CURIOSITY?

- Curiosity has a positive effect on well-being. 'Curiosity has been linked to physical, social, emotional, and psychological well-being, academic success, and success in adulthood' (Kwan, 2021, p. 2).
  - Being curious has positive effects on health. Researchers have followed a large group of people (more than 1000) for five years. People that were rated as 'often curious' at the beginning of the study were more often alive at the end of the study than people that were rated 'less often curious'. In another study, curious people had a smaller chance to develop hypertension and diabetes (Kashdan, 2019, no pagination).
  - Curiosity can make people interested in each other. It encourages us to imagine the position of the other, and to learn about the ideas of the other (Gino, 2018, no pagination).
  - By being curious and pursuing the new and unknown, increased neurological connections grow (Kashdan, 2010, p. 59).
  - The more curious we are about info on a topic, the easier it is to remember it. And we remember even more than info on the topic: we also remember other unrelated information that was shown at the same time (Saville, 2014, no pagination).
  - It can help us with situations in which we think we fail. 'Curiosity is part of failure science. When you see mistakes as events, it is easier to look at them openly. In this way a mistake can become a fact. Looking at things openly is part of curiosity. Curiosity is therefore an important attitude for failure science' (Van der Drift, 2019).
  - 'It seems that in the curious mind, more information is taken in no matter the subject' (Saville, 2014, no pagination).
  - 'All theories agree that curiosity's function is to learn, explore, and immerse in the interesting event. In the long term, curiosity serves a broader function of building knowledge and competence. Exploring new events fosters learning new things, meeting new people, and developing new skills' (Kashdan and Silvia, 2009, p. 368).
  - Engaging in curiosity can help to deal with uncertainty and fear of the unknown (Barth, 2021, no pagination).
  - 'When we are curious, the critical point at which our energy is depleted is pushed back, and we can persist at tasks for longer periods of time' (Kashdan, 2010, p. 66).
  - 'Curiosity is about intrinsic motivation, about the desire to understand, to learn, to explore' (Bodewes, 2022).
  - 'We all have the SuperPower of curiosity. It is an innate feature of being human: the drive to discover; the quest to question why until we reach a satisfying answer or a deeper question; a key to learning with joy' (Gillet, n.d., no pagination).
  - Children's epistemic curiosity influences their intellectual development (Post, 2019, p. 20).
- Is curiosity then always a positive thing? I will go into that question in the next chapter.

3.2 WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE SIDES TO CURIOSITY?



PARTICIPANT STUDIO SUPERKRACHT WITH SUITCASE

I LIKE TO ASK A LOT  
OF QUESTIONS. I AM  
ALWAYS CURIOUS ABOUT  
EVERYTHING. BUT SOME  
PEOPLE TOLD ME THAT THEY  
DON'T APPRECIATE THIS,  
THAT THEY EXPERIENCE IT  
AS TOO MUCH

QUOTE YVONNE VAN DEN HERIK, ARTIST AND VERY CURIOUS PERSON  
(VAN DEN HERIK, 2022)

### 3.3 WHAT ARE THE DOWNSIDES TO CURIOSITY?

One of the lessons at the KFP was devoted to 'questions'. 'Questions are the root of inquiry; they initiate, sustain and invigorate each aspect of the process. Questions direct investigation, drive creativity, stimulate discussion and are the bedrock of reflection' (Casey, 2014, p.510).

We started this lesson by looking at videos of street interviews. Most of these interviews showed an interviewer asking questions that were impertinent, as can be seen on the image on page 50. In this video, the interviewer asked 'Can I read the messages on your phone?' Other videos were making fun of people, for instance by asking them questions using a fake language. We talked about what a real question is, and what could be unpleasant about asking a question or being asked a question. Some of the participants indicated that they would never answer such an interviewer, others mentioned that a question should be formulated very careful.

Here, we touch on one of the downsides to curiosity: if you really want to know something, you can ask a question. But you have to be careful about the way you formulate and the information you ask for. There is a risk of being seen as nosy or impertinent.

#### HOW IS CURIOSITY BEING SEEN?

Curiosity has reached some status as a positive quality, as described in chapter 3.1. Asking questions is one of the expressions of a curious desire. This desire does not always need an answer, it can also be a way of collecting experiences, ideas, and observations.

Asking lots of questions can be part of being curious.

And sometimes people feel that these questions are intruding their private sphere, or are asked in an insensitive way.

When talking to my mother (81) about curiosity, she told me she does not like to be called 'curious'. She is one of the most curious people I know, so it must be the word 'curious' that has a negative connotation for her. She does mention some subjects you should not ask others about. Money and sex are assumed by her to be 'question-taboo' subjects (Dokman, 2021).

The dutch expression 'Nieuwsgierig Aagje' describes the story of a woman who was too curious. She wanted to go to Antwerp out of curiosity. The story ends with her being fed drunk, being robbed, and left on the doorstep of a distinguished house in strange clothes (Couwenbergh, n.d., no pagination). The expression is still being used for someone who deploys very curious behaviour which is on the edge of being too curious. The english expression 'curiosity killed the cat' (earlier mentioned in chapter 2.1) also describes the dangers of curiosity; you could end up in big trouble when following your curiosity.

Next to being seen as intrusive or insensitive, asking questions can also be seen as disobedient.

'In most organizations, leaders and employees alike receive the implicit message that asking questions is an unwanted challenge to authority. They are trained to focus on their work without looking closely at the process or their overall goals' (Gino, 2018, no pagination). In line with this research, philosopher Bas Haring says: 'Scientists (and maybe artists too) often use something that I would call 'critical curiosity': to disagree with what

## 3.3 WHAT ARE THE DOWNSIDES TO CURIOSITY?



'CAN I READ THE MESSAGES ON YOUR PHONE?'

VIDEO OF STREETINTERVIEW, WATCHED WITH PARTICIPANTS OF STUDIO SUPERKRACHT  
(MOOELM, 2021).

### 3.3 WHAT ARE THE DOWNSIDES TO CURIOSITY?

someone else is saying, or to disbelieve something. Such curiosity is often useful because it helps to develop a question, and this question can be translated into an action. The problem in schools, however, is that teachers often don't like it when students learn to be critically curious' (Haring 2022).

#### **DANGER**

So we know that curiosity can be seen as intrusive, as insensitive and as disobedient. Being curious can also be dangerous. Physically dangerous (like the risk of falling down when climbing a mountain peak), socially dangerous (like the risk of being seen as weird, and end up being ignored by others) or emotionally dangerous (like the risk of feeling sad when you try something new and it doesn't work out). Most of us want to stay safe, want to feel included in a group they think is theirs, and want to avoid emotions like sadness.

Sometimes unknown situations are not dangerous, but are perceived as dangerous. Look at the two toddlers on pages 52 (Claes, 2014) and 53 (WFLA Newschannel 8, 2019). (stills from videos, the links are included in the reference list) They both meet their shadow. The toddler on the left explores her shadow in a very fascinated way, in my opinion she stays within the positive, amazed sphere. The toddler on the right is very scared of the discovery of her shadow. She starts to scream and cry, she runs away and falls.

Is the toddler in the video on the right curious? She is experiencing something unknown. But there seems to be no desire or urge to explore, just a feeling of anxiety and the urge to get away as quickly as she can. This toddler is not curious.

While this shadow situation has not brought the toddler on the right to be curious, curiosity can bring people to explore a negatively loaded situation. When interviewing people in public space, one of the questions I asked was 'Do you think curiosity is always pleasant? Or can it also be unpleasant?' Some of the answers of the people I interviewed in public space surprised me: I had thought of curiosity as only positive. All respondents answered that curiosity could also be unpleasant or negative, and they immediately mentioned some examples. 'Like for instance, when you want to find out if your girlfriend is cheating on you' (People in general, 2021) At first, I felt that this 'negative curiosity' was something else, not curiosity. But since curiosity is basically a hunt for knowledge/experience of something unknown, it can also be a hunt for negative knowledge/experience. Psychologists explain that humans have a need to resolve uncertainty. 'The need to know is so strong that people will seek to slake their curiosity even when it is clear the answer will hurt' (Jacobson, 2016, no pagination).

As a next step, I will go into things that can prevent curiosity from happening.



VIDEOSTILLS OF  
TODDLER AND HER  
SHADOW. WATCHED  
WITH PARTICIPANTS OF  
STUDIO SUPERKRACHT

(CLAES, 2013)



VIDEOSTILLS OF  
TODDLER AND HER  
SHADOW. WATCHED  
WITH PARTICIPANTS OF  
STUDIO SUPERKRACHT

(WFLA NEWSCHANNEL,  
2019)

### 3.4 WHAT CAN PREVENT CURIOSITY FROM HAPPENING?

You might think from this thesis so far that I am a very curious person. Sometimes I am. But at many moments I am feeling restricted and frustrated, with no interest in what happens around me. A lot of obstacles are regularly preventing me from being curious. I see this tendency towards ruling out the unknown also in other people. Friends, family, participants in my projects. A theory called 'Negativity bias' seems to go into this aspect of obstacles to curiosity. We are prepared to judge a situation on its dangers, to decide if it is necessary to fight or to flee, or if it is safe enough to explore or relax. 'We are designed to react quickly to potential danger. But more than that, we have the blessed curse of being able to dream up all sorts of scenario's in which we can fail, be hurt, and die, which naturally leads to even more anxiety and worrying. The negativity bias is our intense reaction to potential threat' (Kashdan, *Curious?* p. 47). Let's talk about obstacles and grooves.

#### OBSTACLES

What I call 'obstacles to curiosity' are situations that evoke personal or common resistance. This resistance stands in the way of being/acting curious. This resistance can be a fear for a certain danger. Situations perceived as boring are also seen as obstacles. Deciding that something is boring is like a voice that tells you that you know it all, or that the situation is not worth knowing.

I am not curious about the situation on the image shown on the next page. The war in Ukraine makes me feel sick. I would rather not look at the images, probably because of some kind of warning in my brain: 'stay far away from danger or great sadness'. (I do look at the

images as a helpless form of sympathy – the people there have to undergo this situation, the least I can do is look at the images and be informed)

Remko van der Drift (professor in failing) mentions something else in the interview I did with him: even in very sad situations like this war, there could be an attempt to be curious. Not so much about the sad situation, but about what it does to you. 'The news of the war in Ukraine scares and saddens me. I watch a movie and I feel the anti-curiosity, I feel that I want to get rid of it. I want to get rid of the fear and sadness of maybe another 3rd world war. While it could be very liberating to be open to all my own thoughts and emotions and sensations. Even in this situation' (van der Drift, 2022).

There is a difference between being curious and acting upon curiosity. Being hindered by an obstacle can appear in different forms. A possible form is that curiosity is hindered from the beginning, it does not arise at all (see the image of the hospital in Ukraine). Another possibility is to BE curious but to not act upon it. The obstacle hinders you to act upon your curiosity.

The entrance to the bike parking beneath the Central Station of Rotterdam makes me curious every time I park my bike there (see the image on page 56). The moving walk seems to invite me to bike down, I would very much like to know how it feels to bike down there. My obstacle is not that the sign says that everyone should get off their bikes here, my obstacle is my fear. I feel that something can go wrong if I combine two kinds of moving: enter the moving walk on a moving bike. This fear is probably unjustified, as I see lots of people

## 3.4 WHAT CAN PREVENT CURIOSITY FROM HAPPENING?



WOUNDED PEOPLE IN A HOSPITAL IN UKRAINE  
(TSJERNITSJKIN, 2022)

## 3.4 WHAT CAN PREVENT CURIOSITY FROM HAPPENING?

bike down there. I am convinced that someday I will put the obstacle aside and bike down.



ENTRANCE BICYCLE PARKING,  
CENTRAL STATION ROTTERDAM

I like to imagine such an obstacle as a perceptible thing. It could be an object, or an atmosphere, a sound, or a creature that keeps us from doing something dangerous. I call this obstacle a 'Protector' and elaborated this idea in workshops. Protectors try to safeguard us in dangerous moments. Common dangers in these moments are physical, emotional or social dangers.



PROTECTOR OF PARTICIPANT STUDIO SUPERKRACHT

### GROOVES

When I heard Theisje van Dorsten (researcher of arts education) talk about her research, I encountered the idea of 'grooves' (van Dorsten and Zernitz, 2020). Van Dorsten and Zernitz have conducted research into the imagination of children in special needs schools. They discovered, among other things, the existence of 'groeven (grooves)'. A groove is an ingrained behavioral path. Van Dorsten mentions a boy who always made a

WE HAVE THE BLESSED  
CURSE OF BEING ABLE TO  
DREAM UP ALL SORTS OF  
SCENARIO'S IN WHICH WE  
CAN FAIL, BE HURT, AND DIE

### 3.4 WHAT CAN PREVENT CURIOSITY FROM HAPPENING?

dinosaur, whatever the assignment was. It is common for people to have grooves, but in special education grooves can have a stronger presence.

It is difficult to get out of a groove, and it can withhold us from exploring other subjects, styles, or materials. (van Dorsten and Zernitz, 2020). A groove can block us from being curious about other possibilities.

Others also use the idea of a groove. The writer of 'De groef (The groove)', Maartje Wortel, meets her friend regularly to walk a route in a park. It is always the same route, and she describes the groove that develops.

'Walking a fixed route reinforces the idea that you are slowly digging yourself into something you can't get out of' (Wortel, 2021, page 24).

Is a groove the same thing as a habit? I would say that a groove is a strong habit.

#### **REMOVE OR CHERISH**

Is it a bad thing to be withheld by an obstacle, or to stay in a groove? Is it a problem that an obstacle or a groove prevents us from being curious? I don't think so. It could be a very good idea to have an obstacle block our way before we cross a dangerous road. And it could be very pleasant to have a groove and stay in it. I think it is very wise to be aware of – and to respect - obstacles and grooves. When being aware of them, we can think about them. Do we want an obstacle to be there?

Or, if we take a closer look, would we like to try out something else, and is it wise to remove the obstacle? Maybe I have a very dear groove that I want and respect deeply. Then I don't mind being withheld by this groove

to try other things. Or, if I find out that this groove is not dear to me at all, I might want to try out something else and therefore step out of the groove.

'I didn't want to get out at all, to be honest I just wanted to stay in it forever, but maybe that was the problem' (Wortel, 2021, page 24).

When working with participants, it is not up to me to decide if participants should remove an obstacle, or step out of a groove, or decide to open up to curiosity. Participants in an activity could become more aware of their own behaviour, habits, beloved/hated grooves, (un)wanted obstacles. It is up to them to decide which familiar things to keep, and which new things to try out. I have noticed that, when guiding participants, it is important to find the right attitude. Martijn Engelbregt, artist and designer of friendly/provoking events describes this as 'Some things you experience as safe. Anything outside of 'safe' falls into the 'strange' category. 'Strange' can become kind of an enemy. Our entire apparatus is actually designed to repeat what we know and avoid what is strange and unknown. The projects I do are often an invitation to myself to look at my world, my bandwidth of safety. I invite others to be present and to look at their own world' (Engelbregt, 2022). Marije Nie, researcher of the unknown, states 'I see it as a mission of art to create many entrances for curiosity, for enthusiasm. To make space for gymnastics of the imagination' (Nie, 2023).

Remko van der Drift (van der Drift, 2022) describes how he wants to break one of his strong habits. What he does is not abandoning his iPhone altogether. He abandons it for a short period. A period that he can handle.



### 3.4 WHAT CAN PREVENT CURIOSITY FROM HAPPENING?

'I have a habit that has bothered me: spending time on my iPhone. In January I bought an additional Nokia phone, so I now try to introduce the habit to have my iPhone 'off' more often, and then I want to really experience the moment. What I do now is I don't grab my iPhone but first make coffee, with foaming oat milk, and then look around, and then I have breakfast, and only after breakfast do I grab my iPhone. I feel the addiction. An enormous urge to pick up my phone. I think it's really cool to feel that. That feels like learning and developing. I feel that urge and then I think 'oh, how strong this is!' And to break that habit then! By not doing it. And you know what happens? I suddenly see that my plants have grown! Or I suddenly see that I have a beautiful view of the canal on one side of my house. So this habit really bothered me. But this other habit of mine, making coffee every day with oat milk; a wonderful habit.'

The information gap theory (Loewenstein, 1994, page 93) describes the gap between the familiar and the new. When there is a very big gap, the new thing could be too far away from what someone knows. This person does not get curious. Remember the little girl on page 53, who is frightened of her shadow? I guess that the gap was too big for her. The gap should also not be too small. If you know something already, or know it almost, then it is less likely to get curious. The preference for the size of the gap is personal.

Thijs Witty (staff member of the Master Education in Arts, Piet Zwart Institute), told me about his quests for new knowledge and the influence of the internet. When he has a question that can easily be answered by searching on the internet, he feels dissatisfied even before starting to search. The quest has become too

easy, the gap he prefers should be somewhat bigger in time and in effort.

One way of designing a situation that can make participants aware of obstacles or grooves is to change the size of the gap: make the gap (very) small when the situation is seen as difficult, or make it bigger when the situation is seen as boring/too easy.

Another theory, 'Cultuureducatie met kwaliteit (Cultural education with quality)' uses a concept called 'Omgaan met het verschil (to deal with the difference)'. This concept is described by Barend van Heusden. Van Heusden and others developed an extensive theory for cultural education in schools (primary and secondary education) which I will briefly describe here.

This theory describes the ways that people can deal with - and be aware of culture. Being aware of your own culture and that of others should be the base of cultural education. What are you used to? Is that the same for the group you feel you belong to? 'Group' can be seen as 'inhabitants of a country', but also as 'a certain group of people'. People could feel as a group because of many different features (for instance religion, country that parents were born, area you live in, people who you resemble, people who are passionate about a certain sport, and so on). What is the history of the group you feel you belong to? Which habits, norms and traditions are seen as specific to this group? How are music, dance, theatre, and the visual art being used and seen in this group? How do you feel in relation to 'your' culture? (van Heusden, 2010).

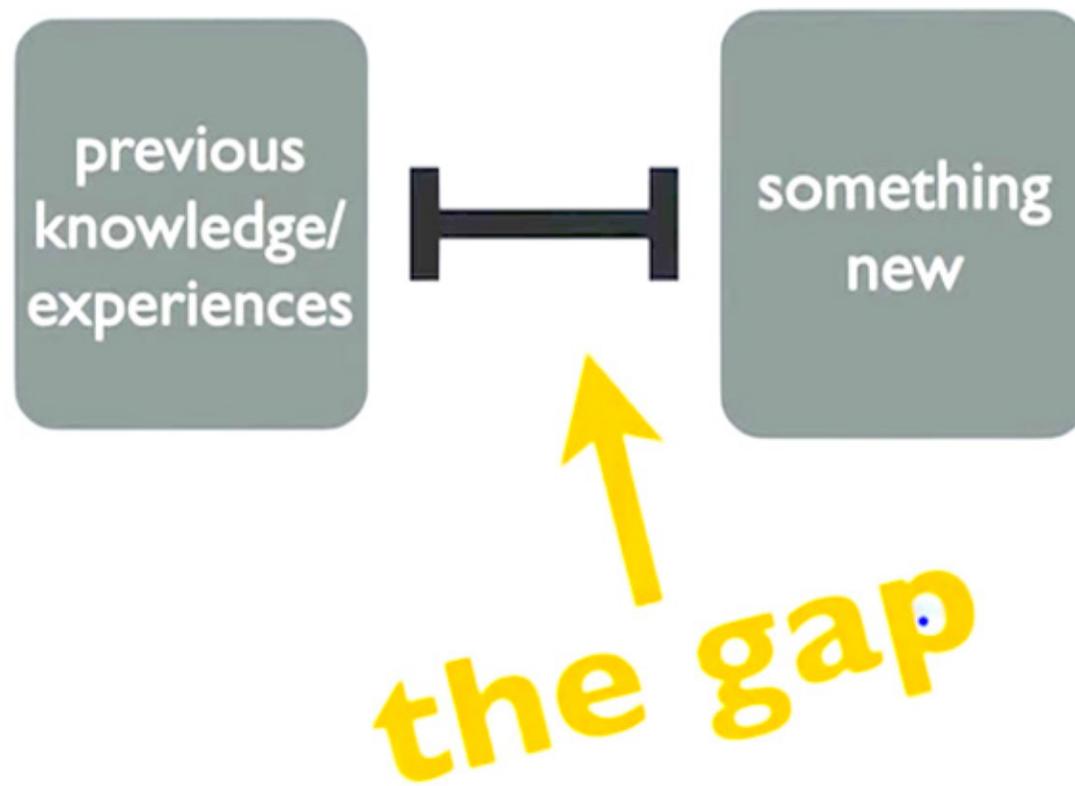
'To deal with the difference' is an extension of this

## 3.4 WHAT CAN PREVENT CURIOSITY FROM HAPPENING?

Can you describe one of your habits?

I always enter my workspace through the same entrance and I always use the same stairs. Even if it's not convenient to get where I have to go.

## 3.4 WHAT CAN PREVENT CURIOSITY FROM HAPPENING?



'MIND THE INFORMATION GAP'  
(JMONDAY1350, 2011)

### 3.4 WHAT CAN PREVENT CURIOSITY FROM HAPPENING?

theory. Our memory constantly compares new situations to situations we already know. We humans know that something we do today, like going to the bakery, does not have to be the same as the way we went to the bakery yesterday.

The weather can be different. We could meet other people than yesterday. We could meet no-one at all. We could feel very different. What the baker offers could be something else than yesterday.

We recognize things and we perceive the difference from what is known to us. Most of the times, these differences are so small that we won't consciously notice them. But sometimes the difference can be so overwhelming that we need to act upon it. We need to process this difference in some way, or we need to put the 'different' thing aside.

This 'dealing with the difference' (van Heusden, 2020, p. 10) is, in my view, the same as 'experiencing an information gap' (Loewenstein, 1994). It is also the area in which curiosity can occur. Sometimes it is not desirable at all to bridge this difference. For example, when the new situation is too dangerous or too uncomfortable. Or when someone has other reasons to not explore this difference, for instance because the existing/original situation makes you very happy (imagine a very pleasant groove, like always wanting to eat a croissant and not a sandwich).

When encouraging participants to be aware of this difference, this can be done like mentioned above, by examining the size of the difference/gap, and by showing possibilities to adapt the size. In the example of the croissant and the sandwich, you could decide to

offer a croissant and one bite of a sandwich.

Besides adapting the size of steps in a situation, there are other ways to approach obstacles, grooves and gaps. We will read about them in the next subchapter.

### 3.5 IN WHICH SITUATIONS DOES CURIOSITY FEEL WELCOME?

I would like to introduce the term 'safe uncertainty'. This term was developed by Barry Mason (a systemic family therapist) and is part of a classification of situations for therapists and social workers. It describes the situation a therapist can accomplish in relation to a client. 'A position of safe uncertainty is a framework for thinking about one's work, orientating one away from certainty to fit, a framework for helping people to fall out of love with the idea that solutions solve things' (Mason, 1993, page 36).

Safe uncertainty describes a position therapists could aim for in relating to a client. A position which is not focussed on 'understanding' but a position of rejecting 'solving' altogether. Williams (2019, page 5) describes the false quest for 'safe certainty'. 'That said, we can safely say with all certainty that there is no certainty!'

'Safety' refers to perceptions about the chances that danger happens (having control on the happening of danger). 'Certainty' refers to the perceived level of knowledge about danger (being able to predict). Mason (1993) recognizes that as humans we all seek a sense of certainty, and that some degree of certainty can help us to move forward in our lives. However, he also suggests that sometimes this can lead to paralysis and lack of creativity. See the figure on page 66, which is related to a therapeutic situation.

Bannister (2022, no pagination) adds 'It is a way of being, not a technique.' Let's imagine this 'way of being' in daily situations with risks that are not life-threatening.

#### Unsafe uncertainty

You are in a train and must be somewhere on time. The

train gets stuck on the route and the situation seems to be serious, no-one knows what is happening. You are already waiting for an hour, and you are not allowed to get out either. 'Having a problem and feeling there is no solution' (Williams, 2019, page 6).

#### Unsafe certainty

You have a contagious disease and must stay in quarantine for some days. 'Having a problem but being clear what is causing it and what will solve it' (Williams, 2019, page 6).

#### Safe certainty

At first glance, this seems to be a position we strive for. And in some situations, it can be worth pursuing. When developing a medicine, the ideal situation would be to eradicate risks. 'The growth of scientific knowledge and its associated technologies has led us to see the natural and the social world as understandable and predictable. Where previous generations would have attributed tragedies and failures to 'fate' or God, we increasingly believe that we can control our environment and make it risk-free.' (Munro, 2004 p.1077)

Example: You are very afraid of heights. You live on the ground floor and never use stairs or elevators.

I think in daily life a wish for safe certainty limits us. But I can also imagine that we need 'safe certain moments' in which we can relax. For a certain period there can of course be safe certainty. When sleeping, it is certainly desirable to feel absolutely safe and certain.

#### Safe uncertainty

Mason (1993, p. 36) describes this position as being in a state of flow and exploration, and being able to search

CERTAINTY CAN CONTRIBUTE  
TO A STATE OF PARALYSIS  
AND LACK OF CREATIVITY

## 3.5 IN WHICH SITUATIONS DOES CURIOSITY FEEL WELCOME?

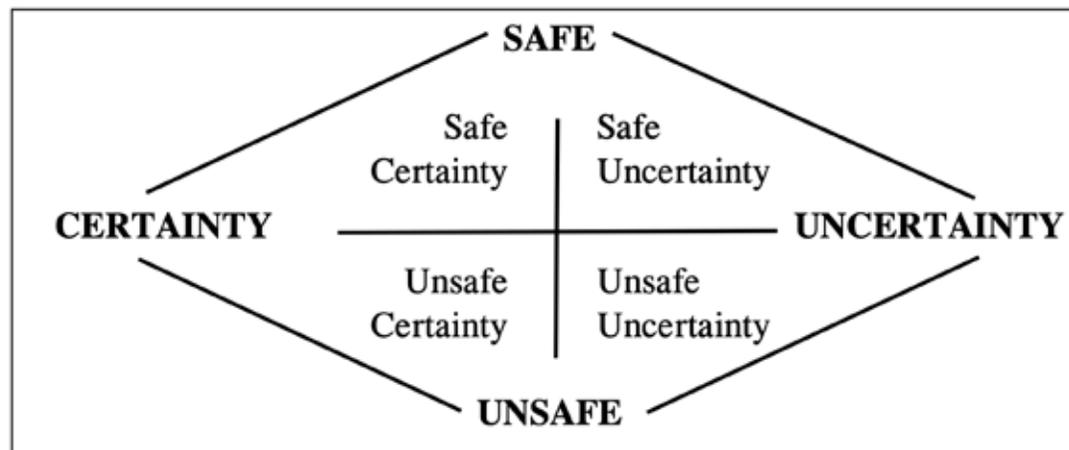


Figure I. Towards Positions of Safe Uncertainty

MASON, 1993 (P. 36)

for multiple explanations.

'For useful change to happen we sometimes need to become less certain of the positions we hold. When we become less certain of the positions we hold, we are more likely to become receptive to other possibilities, other meanings we might put to events. If we can become more open to the possible influence of other perspectives, we open up space for other views to be stated and heard' (Mason, 1993, p 195).

Safe uncertainty is a state in which you open up to various views and experiences, to insecurity and doubt, to different perspectives. I think safe uncertainty is desirable as a state to welcome curiosity. As described for therapy situations, Mason tells us that safe uncertainty is consistent with never understanding too quickly, with respectful curiosity and with becoming aware of distinctions which previously were outside

conscious experience. He thinks 'safe uncertainty' can help to orient away from a position of 'knowing how things should be' and towards positions that offer space for different possibilities (Mason, 1993, p. 36).

In my opinion, the position of 'safe uncertainty' correlates with the description of a certain personality-type, 'The Fascinated'. The Fascinated is a subgroup of curious personalities in a distinction made by psychologist Todd Kashdan. This is the most common understanding of a curious person. Someone that has the energy, the time and the opportunity to explore, discover, develop passions and interests, and uncover a full potential. This personality is described as being often a highly educated adult who makes more money than those in the other profiles (Kashdan *et al*, 2018, page 142).

### 3.5 IN WHICH SITUATIONS DOES CURIOSITY FEEL WELCOME?

This quote from Agnes Varda seems to fit the subgroup of The Fascinated: 'I'm curious. Period. I find everything interesting. Real life. Fake life. Objects. Flowers. Cats. But mostly people. If you keep your eyes open and your mind open, everything can be interesting' (Obrist, 2018, no pagination).

'The Fascinated' seems to be a group of people with advantages in life. Is having this kind of personality a luxury; is it easier to develop curiosity for advantaged people? People that have time and energy and a basic safety at their disposal? It certainly looks that way. We already know that being curious is always about the desire for something new or uncertain. Danae Bodewes (2021) explains 'if you experience a lot of stress, you are overstimulated and you are not open to new stimuli'. Kashdan (2010, page 66) tells us that although curiosity seems to produce energy, our brains often try to avoid getting curious. Saving energy and time seems to be the goal of our brain. To be incurious requires less brain activity. Being incurious is to sign out a part of your brain, your mind wanders without thinking or without being aware. A mindset of curiosity costs a lot of energy. It tells you to be aware of what is on your mind, to think about how to explore or what to say. And when we surrender to curiosity, we take time and energy away from pursuing other needs. You could see this as a series of trade-offs, as a process in which you are the one coordinating when to be curious (Kashdan, 2021, no pagination). When it is not possible to spend time and energy on curiosity, because it is crucial to spend it on other things, it is more difficult to get curious. Again, there seems to be an inequality in the distribution of the living conditions of curiosity, and therefore an inequality in the possibility to reach a curious state.

In the quote on the next pages the interviewee (People in general, 2021) indicated a cultural difference handling time and energy. If she is right, the circumstances in which curiosity occurs could be different per country, per culture, per group. The implications of this difference for building a situation go beyond the scope of this research. Of course, a situation is often designed for a certain group of participants, which can diminish this unequal accessibility. But I feel this difference in accessibility of curiosity does need further research.

#### **ELEMENTS OF A WELCOMING SITUATION**

Time and energy are essential conditions for curiosity to strike (Kashdan *et al*, 2018, page 142). The influence on the time and energy of others is limited. Even worse than that, saving energy and time seems to be the goal of our brain (Kashdan, 2021, no pagination). The first impuls of a participant in a situation with new elements could be to save energy and thus to oppose active participation. But once participants are curious, their curiosity seems to produce energy (Kashdan 2010, page 66).

A situation should therefore capture the attention of participants, so it could arouse initial curiosity. So in order to help curiosity to develop, we need some initial curiosity. That is a strange entanglement of elements. In my practices this is often solved by the creation of a seducing setting, which can help participants to enter a state of initial curiosity. The image on page 70 shows 'De wij-kunnen-ook-niet-tekenen-club (The we-cannot-draw-too-club)', one of the concepts of Superduo. The piece of furniture and the strange/funny name is designed to incite an initial moment of curiosity.

THE HURRYING HERE . . . I AM  
FROM BRAZIL. HERE THE  
DAY CAN HAVE 48 HOURS  
AND THEN YOU ARE STILL  
NOT FINISHED. SO I CANNOT  
SWITCH OFF HERE, HEY,  
THERE IS NO BEAUTIFUL  
BEACH HERE, THERE IS NO . .  
JUST NO . .

YES THERE ARE BEAUTIFUL  
PEOPLE, I MUST SAY THAT,  
REALLY BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE,  
THANK YOU VERY MUCH! BUT  
YOU HAVE TO HURRY FOR  
YOUR MONEY, YOU HAVE TO  
HURRY, DO THIS, YOU HAVE ..  
YES YOU HAVE A HEADACHE  
ALL THE TIME, YOU DON'T  
HAVE 'I ENJOY MYSELF'.

## 3.5 IN WHICH SITUATIONS DOES CURIOSITY FEEL WELCOME?



THE WE-CANNOT-DRAW-TOO-CLUB  
(SUPERDUO, 2015)

### 3.5 IN WHICH SITUATIONS DOES CURIOSITY FEEL WELCOME?

A state of safe uncertainty can also contribute to a welcoming situation. In this state participants open up to various views and experiences, to insecurity and doubt, to different perspectives.

How to define what is 'safe'? I agree with Preisler, who works in child welfare. She describes feeling safe as 'you do not anticipate either harm or hurt' (Preisler, 2013, no pagination). I would like to add that having control on the occurrence of danger contributes to feeling safe. (Bannister 2022, p. 1)

As for 'uncertain', I will adopt the description of the Cambridge Dictionary: 'not known or fixed, or not completely certain'. Research shows that unpredictability significantly increases people's discomfort. Robson (2021, no pagination) describes experiments with people receiving electric shocks. Participants show greater stress if there is a 50% chance that they might receive a shock, for example, compared to situations in which there is a 100% certainty that they will experience an electric shock. When creating situations in which curiosity feels welcome, the uncertainty we are looking is relatively small. It does not expel a feeling of safety, it mildly disarranges. This relates to what we have learned in the previous chapter about the size of steps/gaps. The way to something new or unknown can be divided in steps of the right size.

#### HOW?

In practices of others and of myself, I can detect elements that help to create these situations.

A situation in which participants don't experience

right and wrong is usually fertile ground for curiosity. For example, a situation in which participants are researchers. Or like the example of 'The we-cannot-draw-too-club' on page 70: the assignments are designed in such a way that it is impossible to do what you intend to. You just have to surrender to this alternative reality of not being able to control what would normally be very controllable.

It can be helpful to give participants a role. This role can provide safety and an entry into uncertainty. It can be a role that does not exist yet, like watching the grass grow. Or a role that requires the interpretation of a participant, like choosing a title that matches you. Or a role that is very easy, like listening to a story. On the next page we see an example of the work of Circus Andersom (Circus Andersom, 2021) in which the public gets a role as reporter of problems and/or as working on solutions.

Remember the description of curiosity that this thesis uses? 'A strong desire to pursue something which is partly new, unknown, or unpredictable' (This thesis, p.30). The introduction of something new or unknown into a situation is crucial. This can be done in countless ways, ranging from introducing something very small (like offering participants a new food), to introducing something very large (like asking participants to write a song and perform it in public). The route towards this unknown element is important. Designing smaller or bigger steps, already mentioned in subchapter 3.4, can be seen in the practice of playcoach Marieke van Dam. One of her ideas is the 'Random Book Club'. The sight of a pile of unread books, waiting for you to start reading them, can be an obstacle. The Random Book

## 3.5 IN WHICH SITUATIONS DOES CURIOSITY FEEL WELCOME?



HET LOKET (THE COUNTER)  
CIRCUS ANDERSOM (2021)

### 3.5 IN WHICH SITUATIONS DOES CURIOSITY FEEL WELCOME?

Club is an online meeting of people who have non-fiction books waiting for them to be read. Together they read a random page of one of the books and dig deep into this page by doing some writing assignments (van Dam, n.d.). In an interview she explained 'We are so inclined to want to do things right and read a book from cover to cover. And sometimes we are impressed by the knowledge of writers. That can be daunting. With the Random Book Club we reveal in small steps how you react to what you read. In this way, you just start to read. And you might learn more from one page than if you had read the entire book' (van Dam, 2022).

Another beautiful example of introducing the unknown is highlighted on page 74: The '8 =infinity' perspective of Marije Nie, researcher of the unknown. A familiar equation with only one answer is turned it into something open and unpredictable. (Nie, 2022)

Adapting to familiar elements of the participants is another way to create a safe feeling. For example, using a location that is known to the participants, or relating to other familiar elements like their habits, the neighbourhood, free time activities, or daily behaviour. Inside this trusted situation, something new or unknown will be encountered more easily.

Van Heusden (2020, p. 10) tells us to use the senses, our imagination, concepts, and analyses in order to bridge a difference. Although this theory is not specifically about curiosity, I see the area that should be bridged as the area in which curiosity could feel welcome. His aim is to use all of these 4 skills within a situation, when possible. This might seem like a lot. I have learned that participants differ in their preference and experience

of these skills. It is very wise to combine them within a situation, to make sure that all individuals in a group feel involved. If the situation is designed as explorative, playful, and without right and wrong, participants are encouraged to try out skills they might not be used to.

In chapter 4, we will go into the situations of Studio Superkracht.

I LOVE THE '8 = INFINITY'  
PERSPECTIVE.  
IF YOU ASK  
- WHAT IS  $3 + 5$ ? -  
YOU ARE IMMEDIATELY  
DONE. IF YOU ASK  
- WHAT IS 8? -  
THE POSSIBILITIES ARE  
ENDLESS.

## **4. STUDIO SUPERKRACHT**

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## 4.1 WHAT IS STUDIO SUPERKRACHT?

STUDIO SUPERKRACHT IS  
AN INSTITUTE IN WHICH  
PARTICIPANTS EXPLORE  
CURIOSITY

## 4.2 DESIGN OF SITUATIONS

Studio Superkracht consisted of a series of 10 lessons at the KFP (Kinderfaculteit Pendrecht). The series was named Studio Superkracht (Studio Superpower). A 'Studio' is meant to try out things, to explore. 'Superpower' refers to the many descriptions of curiosity as a superpower (for instance Gillet (n.d)).

Participants could read on the website of the KFP about Studio Superkracht: 'Did you know that being curious is a superpower? And that everyone has this superpower? This power can help you to want to know things. At Studio Superkracht, we will do cheerful curious things. We're going to see what makes you curious. Sometimes we do crafts, sometimes we look at something very closely, we will question each other and we will measure things. We're going to find out more about curiosity.'

Seven participants subscribed to the series. They were 8, 9 and 10 years old. This series took place in October, November and December 2021.

Starting from the research question of this thesis, the main goal was to create testsituations that welcome curiosity. How could the situation be designed? Which elements would contribute to a welcoming situation?

At the same time, within this test site the participants and I explored curiosity itself: How do the participants describe curiosity? Do they recognize their own curiosity when it occurs? Which activities help them to understand their own curiosity? Which activities help them to actively pursue curiosity when wanted? Which elements block the pursuing of their curiosity? I aimed for some awareness of curiosity to develop. Awareness of curiosity in general, and awareness of

each participant's individual curiosity.

Ideas for activities and for the set up of Studio Superkracht were based on ideas from my practices as an artist/educator. Within the series, I decided on the specific content from lesson to lesson. What happened in one lesson led to the structure and subjects of the next lesson. The series and connecting subjects are summarized in subchapter 4.3: 'Overview of lessons'. In subchapters 4.4 and 4.5, two lessons and situations are described in more detail.

Below I will describe the set up for Studio Superkracht in elements that together created the situations.

### RECURRING / FAMILIAR ELEMENTS

- The concept of visiting the KFP for interesting lessons after school is a routine for Primary School students in Pendrecht. The participants in my research had all been there before to follow lessons. The KFP has its own building which was already known to participants. All lessons at the KFP last 1 hour or 1,5 hour. The room that we worked in was always the same room. The day of the week was always a Tuesday afternoon.
- The titleboard of Studio Superkracht was always present in the room. A suitcase with a questionmark was also always present.
- The group consisted of participants from different schools. Some of them knew each other already, others did not. In the first lesson, an assignment was planned to get to know each other.
- I was in the room to welcome participants. I would chat with them about their day, or about other subjects



STILLS OF VIDEO WATCHED WITH PARTICIPANTS OF STUDIO SUPERKRACHT AS PART OF EXPLORING THE CONCEPT OF CURIOSITY IN THE FIRST LESSON. 'WHAT IS THIS SEAL DOING? WHAT DO YOU THINK IT WANTS TO KNOW?'

(CURIOUS BABY SEAL APPROACHES CAMERAMAN, 2016)

that came up, until the group was complete. My attitude towards the participants was attentive and caring.

### **EXPLORE**

The participants were assigned a role as exploring researchers. How would they see curiosity and related elements? What makes them curious, and how does that feel? They knew that they would be part of my research, and that their research would help me. We explored concepts, ideas, people and activities.

### **REFLECT**

During the lessons, I planned for an alternation of reflecting and doing. This way I hoped participants were able to grow aware of what curiosity is, how it feels, what makes them curious and what not. Also, reflection could possibly give meaning to what had just been experienced. Individual differences were planned to be discussed and respected.

### **THEMES OF LESSONS**

All themes were in my view relating to curiosity: zooming in and out, research, titles, doubt, coincidence, failure, questions, boring things, play, various views, contagiousness of curiosity, and obstacles to curiosity.

### **CONNECT TO THE WORLD OF THE PARTICIPANTS**

I planned to use examples and materials that were related to free time activities of the participants, and of which I guessed that they could incite curiosity. I intended to closely observe the participants in each lesson to decide which images, videos, materials and activities would work best.

### **NO RIGHT AND WRONG**

The participants were explained that there was no right and wrong in Studio Superkracht. In my view this is a prerequisite for exploration.

### **PLAY AND FUN**

'Play is curiosity and joy in a blender. Besides being pleasurable, play is a training ground to develop essential social and problem-solving skills that last a lifetime' (Kashdan, 2010 p. 50). Having fun through playful activities seemed to be a good entrance to reach an understanding of curiosity, instead of connecting it to a more formal educational setting in which a skill should be mastered or facts should be known. We would in fact be learning about curiosity, while having fun.

### **MY ROLE**

As for my role, I intended to be undefined, to take on a mix of roles: a participating researcher, an artist, a designer of activities and an educator. When being in the situation, participation would be most important. The group of participants and I would explore curiosity together. This way, we would be able to approach curiosity with curiosity. My role as a situation researcher was mainly aimed at designing the situation of the lesson in advance and analyzing it afterwards.

### **BINDERS AND FORMS**

- Participants got their own binder in the first lesson. They could choose their own colour. The binders were taken home. The next lesson the participants brought them again. In the binders were also plastic maps for some of the small materials that could be taken home. The binders slowly turned into treasuries of drawings, notes and materials.

- The binders started out as empty binders, and were filled by the forms that we used in every lesson. On the forms were simple questions that were part of the planned activities, for example to write down or draw what their experience was. An activity could also be preceded by questions on a form. This was an element that I added to stimulate planning before doing. Thinking ahead might focus the participants in their research. Writing things down could work as a form of reflection.

### **SMALL STEPS**

In the design of the lessons and in the conversations we had, I prepared small steps to be sure that everyone would understand what was discussed, and that participants would not drop out because of a gap being too big. I was not afraid of a gap being too small, that could easily be tackled on the go by skipping a step or by adding information, questions or extra assignments.

### **INSTITUTE: STUDIO SUPERKRACHT**

The use of an institute, Studio Superkracht, created an official environment meant to do research. I expected the participants to have questions about this institute, to feel the desire to find out more about it.

### **THINGS THAT WERE ALLOWED**

In order to explore, some things could be allowed in the lessons that normally would not be allowed. I decided it was necessary to see per lesson what was allowed and what was not allowed. Participants did not know beforehand what was allowed to do.

### **THE UNKNOWN**

- Every lesson was planned to relate to the unknown

or to unpredictability, by doing and talking. We would search for the boundaries between the familiar and the unexpected/unknown.

- The suitcase contained a surprise each lesson. Most of the time this was a material that we needed for an activity.

- The expectation per lesson was uncertain. The participants were not informed about the content of the next lesson. What happened in one lesson helped me to determine what we would do in the next lesson.

- The setting of the room for a particular lesson was not planned to be the same. The setting would follow the plan for the lesson. (chairs, tables, work inside, outside)

## 4.2 DESIGN OF SITUATIONS



IMAGES OF THE USE OF THE ROOM AT THE KFP  
STUDIO SUPERKRACHT



PARTICIPANT OF STUDIO SUPERKRACHT OPENING THE SUITCASE

## 4.3 OVERVIEW OF LESSONS

### 1. INTRODUCTION AND ACTIVITY WITH LITTLE FIGURES

In the introduction lesson, we got to know each other and our thoughts on curiosity, and some essentials for the whole series of activities were handed out.

The suitcase, the binders and the use of forms were introduced. In the suitcase were some little figures. The participants each got 5 of these figures, to imagine what the world around you looks like when being as small as such a figure. They could take these figures home and do all kinds of experiments with them in their free time. The participants were asked to describe these experiments on the accompanying forms.



### 2. DO RESEARCH ON AN APPLE

Each lesson started with a short discussion of the last lesson, the way it was experienced, and what was done at home. Usually, at the end of each lesson a voluntary activity was offered (described on a form), that could be done at home. The little figures were cherished. Lots of experiments were done with them at home, and throughout the series, these figures came back. Participants decided to include them in other activities or they permanently resided in the pockets of the participants.

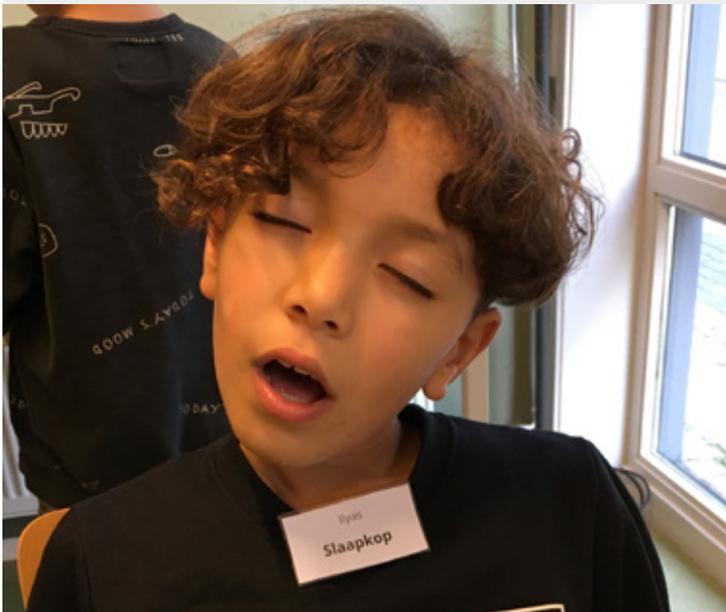
What has been done so far with the little figures can be called 'research'. In this lesson we explored the meaning of 'research', and we did research on apples.

'Do research on an apple' is described as one of the examples. See subchapter 4.4.



### 3. WHAT IS YOUR TITLE?

The participants have been titled 'researchers' when they worked with the apples. When imagining having various titles, what would they be? We thought about that together. What kind of titles could we think of for each other? How do you see yourself? What do you really like to do? We explored the view the participants had on themselves and on others.



### 4. COINCIDENCE

A lot of the things you do are planned. Last week we thought about what your titles are. And how you can change them, when you plan to do something else. For example, you have a title 'Runner' and a title 'Sleepyhead'. When you plan to run, you could first use your title 'Runner'. And when you plan to be lazy or sleepy, you can change your title into 'Sleepyhead'.

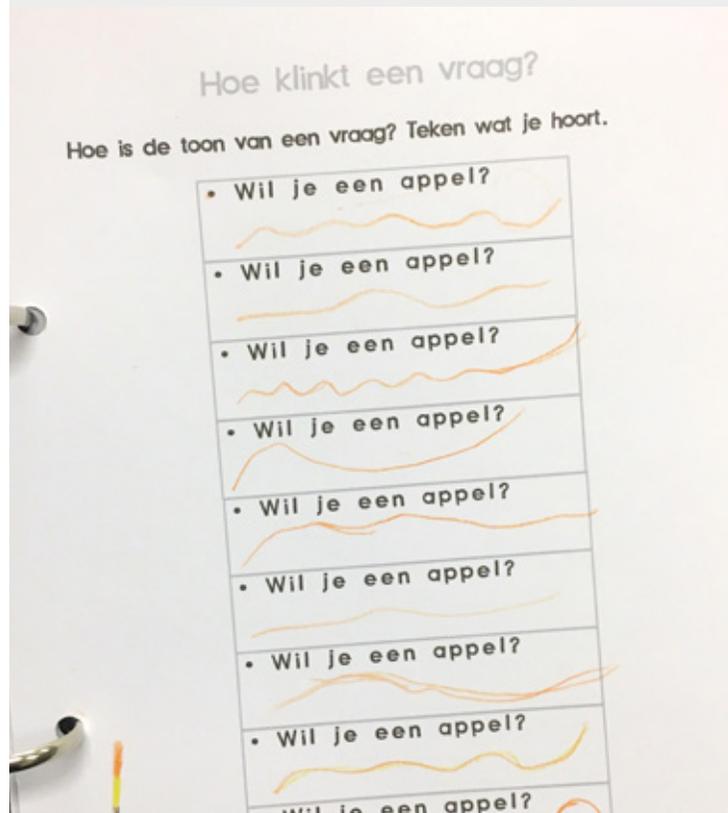
When things just happen, without being planned, sometimes we call them 'a coincidence'. What is coincidence? Are the participants aware of coincidence in their lives? Do they like to include 'coincidental moments'? Does coincidence often lead to curiosity?



## 5. WHAT IS A QUESTION?

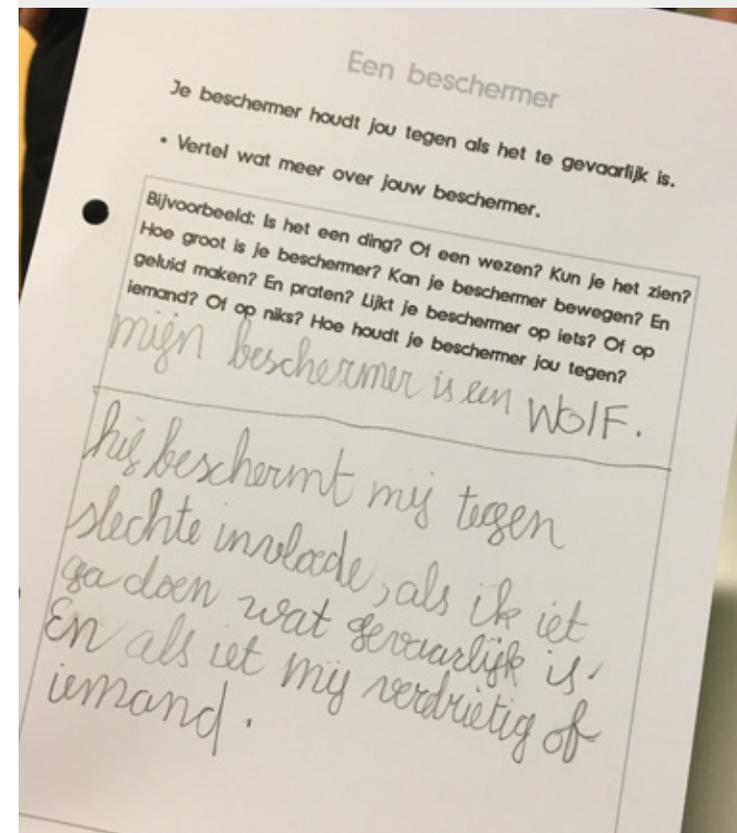
In the previous lessons, we asked a lot of questions. What is coincidence? What can be your titles? How does it feel to be curious? What happens when I drop an apple on the floor? How does a mini figure see my pillow?

But what is a question? This activity is described as one of the examples. See subchapter 4.5.



## 6. SOMETIMES WE ARE NOT CURIOUS

Last time, we interviewed people in public space, as part of our exploration of questions. That was a bit scary for the participants. What kind of situations scare them? And do they get curious in scary situations? When do we protect ourselves from being curious? And how?



### 7. FAILURE, DOUBT AND VARIOUS OPTIONS

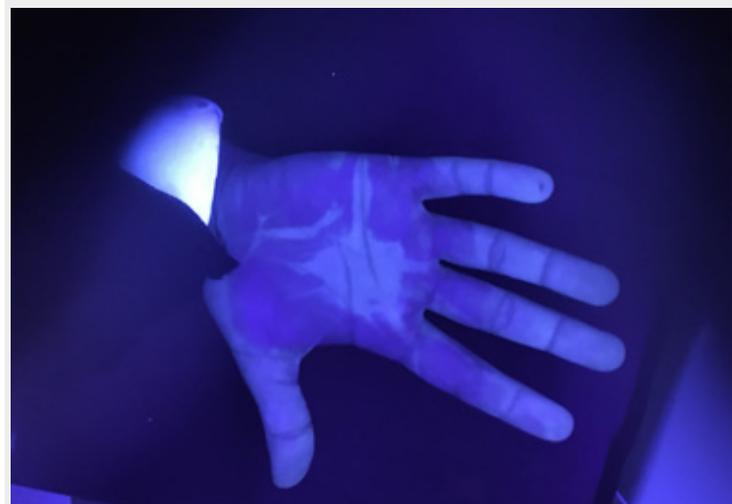
The participants talked in 'Sometimes we are not curious' (lesson 6) about how scary it can be when things can go wrong. This time we went into failure and doubt: How bad is it when something goes wrong? Is failing something you can always avoid? We started with a failed cake that was hidden in the suitcase (one of the participants had his birthday). Doubt is usually seen as weak: you don't choose, you doubt between options. This introduced the concept of various options, which was explored through looking at an image of a crying baby. What could have happened? How many different stories can we tell?



### 8. CURIOSITY IS CONTAGEOUS

Telling different stories about the same image made the participants curious about the stories of the others. You might say that we infected each other, that curiosity is contagious. How would that work? We started out deepening our thoughts on 'contagious', using our experience with the corona virus. And we tested how we could infect each other through a handshake: sun block is visible in black light. One of us used sun block on his hand.

When shaking the hands of the others, the sun block became visible on their hands too. We tried to translate this experience into making sketches on curiosity. The sketches depicted a curious feeling about something specific, and ideas on how to infect a friend with this curiosity.



### 9. HOW TO MAKE SOMETHING BORING INTERESTING

We tried to think about infecting someone else with our curiosity. Could we also infect ourselves with curiosity? How can we turn something boring into something interesting? I brought a clothespin in the suitcase and hoped the participants would find that very broing (they did). Then they worked on making a video with the clothespin, in duos. The question was 'make a video about/with a clothespin, that turns the clothespin into an interesting thing'. The videos they came up with were games with clothespins, like: Who can disassemble the clothespin the fastest? Can we throw the clothespin in a basket from a certain distance? How can we craft with a clothespin?

All participants agreed that we made something boring into something interesting.



### 10. GAME, RECAP

First we watched the video's of the week before, which I edited at home. Then we made a game with elements of the previous lessons. In the suitcase were round cardboards, numbered from 1 to 30. Together, we made a board game. We decided that when reaching certain numbers, you should start over or skip a turn. Every participant could decide on one extra assignment. These were written them on the cardboards. I suggested to use elements of the first 9 lessons, and I brought the materials we used. We attached the cardboards to the floor and played the game.



## 4.4 AN EXAMPLE: DO RESEARCH ON AN APPLE

### DO RESEARCH ON AN APPLE

What is research? How can we do research on common subjects, using common instruments? Can doing research contribute to evoking curiosity?

The participants and I talked about what a researcher is. Which kinds of researchers do exist? Can you recognize a researcher? When are you a researcher yourself? Hidden in the suitcase were badges with the names of the participants and a title 'researcher'.

I brought 10 kilos of apples, and a lot of instruments, tools and materials. Knives (blunt), a scale, a wooden hammer, thermometer, a mirror, tape measure, apple

slicer, images of apples, apple drill, rope, apple corer, tape, wooden sticks, magnifier, water, cloth, paper. I told the participants that they would do research on/ with apples. Everything was allowed to do, besides hurting yourself or another participant, or destroying something else than an apple.

I had prepared simple forms to make a plan before doing something. The forms had the following instructions with input fields:

- What happens when . . .
- This happened: . . .

The participants immediately started to experiment and were very excited that the apples could be used



THIS PAGE:  
BADGE 'ONDERZOEKER'  
(RESEARCHER)

PAGE 89:  
PARTICIPANTS OF  
STUDIO SUPERKRACHT  
USING A FORM AND  
EXPLORING AN APPLE

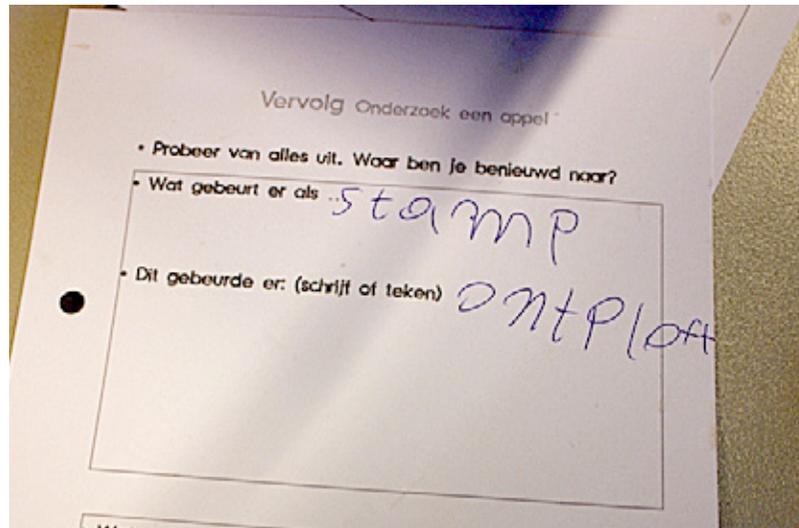
## 4.4 AN EXAMPLE: DO RESEARCH ON AN APPLE

as they wanted. My set up was to first think what you want to do, describe the plan on the form, then do it, and then describe or draw how it was. At first the participants had a lot of trouble using the forms, because it was difficult to not immediately get to work. I had to be strict to get them to use the forms, but when the process of using the forms started, it structured their actions. They combined thinking and acting and got more aware of what they did.

Some of the instruments I brought were known, others were not. This combination was great, because the instruments became subjects of research themselves.



## 4.4 AN EXAMPLE: DO RESEARCH ON AN APPLE



• WHAT HAPPENS WHEN: 'STAMP'

• THIS HAPPENED: 'EXPLODED'

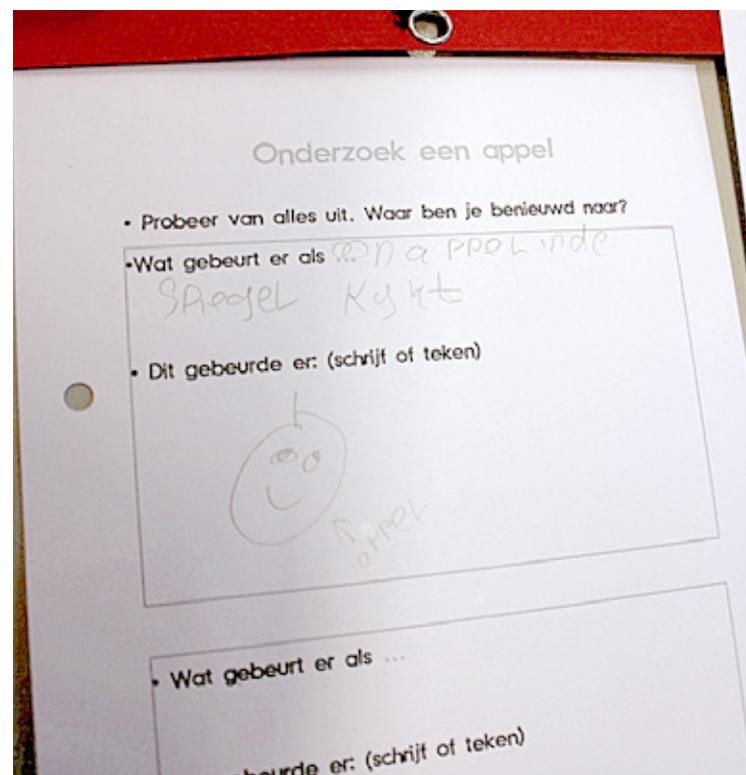
FORM OF PARTICIPANT STUDIO SUPERKRACHT

## 4.4 AN EXAMPLE: DO RESEARCH ON AN APPLE



PARTICIPANT STUDIO SUPERKRACHT  
EXPLORING AN APPLE

## 4.4 AN EXAMPLE: DO RESEARCH ON AN APPLE



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN: 'AN APPLE LOOKS IN THE MIRROR?'

FORM OF PARTICIPANT OF STUDIO SUPERKRACHT

4.4 AN EXAMPLE: DO RESEARCH ON AN APPLE



PARTICIPANT STUDIO SUPERKRACHT  
EXPLORING AN APPLE

#### 4.4 AN EXAMPLE: DO RESEARCH ON AN APPLE

##### WHAT DID I NOTICE

- The participants needed some extra instructions to make written plans before acting. These oral instructions were more resolute than I am used to give. Was the assignment still open enough? In the end, I think writing down their ideas beforehand made their actions more determined. And reflection on what they did was easier this way. The writing brought them awareness of what they were doing.
- The instruments seemed to invite the participants to use them. They aroused the curiosity of the participants.
- Being able to destroy was very exciting, but the participants did not stick to that. They clearly aspired to try out different things. Imagination became a natural part of the activities. **'The apple clearly likes to look at itself in the mirror'** *Statement of participant on the form*
- Doing research led to enthusiasm and to curiosity. The curiosity of the participants was immediately raised by the instruments. While trying out the instruments, plans for experiments on the apples developed. Participants were very curious about what would happen in their experiments.
- Because there was one material to do research on, the focus was on making the plans and using the instruments.
- The conversation about research and what it means to be a researcher at the start of the lesson was an easy step to the next part, being a researcher.
- The research environment was emphasized by the protected tables (plastic), the displayed instruments and the titles with 'researcher'.
- The instruction 'What happens when...?' was so open that participants could create their own assignment. They could choose to do something small like 'smell the apple' or they could choose to go bigger as in 'throw the apple on the floor until it breaks'
- The outcome on the form was formulated as 'What happened?' This gave participants the freedom to describe what happened, without any specific goal having to be achieved.
- There was permission to do things that were not allowed on other moments. This way, the participants knew that they would not get a reprimand for destroying apples or for making a mess. But this also caused some unrest. I heard participants ask 'Am I really allowed to do this?' They hesitated, probably because certain rules are internated. One participant said in a disapproving tone 'What a mess! If this happened at my house...'

4.4 AN EXAMPLE: DO RESEARCH ON AN APPLE



PARTICIPANT STUDIO SUPERKRACHT  
EXPLORING AN APPLE

## 4.5 AN EXAMPLE: WHAT IS A QUESTION?

Questions are the base of curiosity. Questions to yourself or to others express a desire to fill a knowledge/experience gap, or express a desire to stay in the unknown and pose a question that will / can not be answered.

We explored the theme of questions. How would the participants describe what a question is? Do they like to ask questions? When is a question a real question, and when is it in fact something else, disguised as a question? Why do people disguise something as a question? When and how can questions be asked? What is your way to ask a question?

### WHAT DO YOU THINK A 'REAL QUESTION' IS?

'Something that asks what you want to ask'

'You start to question because you want to know something'

'You do it if you are searching for information'

'A sentence which you make if you want to know something'

'There are different kind of questions! Questions that ask if you can do something, or questions to which you want to know the answer'

'You can also pose questions to move forward, to get wiser'

'If it is not a real question, then you cannot answer it'

Quotes of participants during Studio Superkracht

We watched videos of interviews that ask questions that people do not want to answer. Like 'Can I read the messages on your phone?' (See image on page 50) Which questions would you refuse to answer?

### ARE THERE QUESTIONS YOU DON'T WANT TO ANSWER?

'When someone in the class asks what my grade is, ususally she has a good grade herself. Sometimes I don't want to tell, you don't want to share your grade if it is not very good'

'I would never answer if someone in public space was going to ask me something'

Quotes from participants during Studio Superkracht

We observed each other when asking a question (what happens to the other's face, and to the other's voice?)

### WHAT DOES A QUESTIONING FACE LOOK LIKE?

'He looked different than normal'

'He kept looking at me'

'Your eyes looked as if you have a good day today'

'You smiled and you looked very interested'

Quotes from participants during Studio Superkracht

### WHAT DOES A QUESTION SOUND LIKE?

The participants listened very carefully when we posed the same question one by one. They made drawings of the sounds they heard.

And we went outside to ask questions to people in public space. Before going out, we extensively discussed how the participants wanted to approach the people they wanted to interview, which questions they wanted to ask, which way these questions would be asked and what they would do if someone did not want to be interviewed. Each participant noted his/her questions on the form in the binder.

## 4.5 AN EXAMPLE: WHAT IS A QUESTION?



VIDEOSTILL OF 'SAVED BY THE BELL MET FREEK', WATCHED WITH PARTICIPANTS OF STUDIO SUPERKRACHT AS PART OF EXPLORING THE CONCEPT OF A QUESTION. 'HOW IS THIS BOY'S FACE CHANGING WHEN HE ASKS A QUESTION?' (SBS 6, 2019)

IMAGINE BEING IN THE  
METRO. YOUR FEET ARE ON  
THE SEAT IN FRONT OF YOU.  
SOMEONE WALKS BY AND  
SAYS 'DO YOU DO THE SAME  
AT HOME?'

DOES THIS PERSON REALLY  
WANT TO KNOW IF YOU DO  
THE SAME AT HOME?

#### 4.5 AN EXAMPLE: WHAT IS A QUESTION?

In the suitcase were insulation pipes and windshields for microphones. Together they formed a rather realistic looking microphone. The participants enjoyed playing with them. They could choose themselves if they wanted to use the microphone outside or not. Some participants used them, others did not.

Going outside and asking questions to strangers at first excited the participants. They jumped up and down and stood immediately in line to go outside. When outside, they pulled back. They indicated that they were afraid that people would not like them to ask questions, and that this thought blocked them. The participants decided to work in small groups, that made them feel safer.

When reflecting on how they experienced the activity, the participants were very factual in telling the group what exactly the questions and the answers were. This could be because they wanted to know the answers and liked to repeat them. It could also be a way of digesting what just happened, as participants indicated this activity was almost too exciting.

## 4.5 AN EXAMPLE: WHAT IS A QUESTION?



PARTICIPANTS STUDIO SUPERKRACHT  
ASKING QUESTIONS (ALSO ON PAGE 103)

I LIKED IT, BUT IT WAS  
ALMOST TOO EXCITING. THE  
PEOPLE WERE NICE, BUT  
THAT WAS MAYBE BECAUSE  
WE ARE CHILDREN

QUOTE OF PARTICIPANT STUDIO SUPERKRACHT  
ABOUT INTERVIEWING PEOPLE IN PUBLIC SPACE

Vragen stellen

- Wat wil je onderzoeken?  
Bedenk een vraag. Of meer vragen.

Wat is u naam.

Heeft u een huisdier

- Wat is het antwoord van persoon 1?

heeft u een huisdier

Kat en a

- Wat is het antwoord van persoon 2?

nee maar van  
geen  
huisdier

Studio  
Superkracht



#### 4.5 AN EXAMPLE: WHAT IS A QUESTION?

##### WHAT DID I NOTICE

- Watching the videos enabled the group to be aware of what really happened in the videos. The participants distinguished between an interested interviewer and someone who just wants to make fun about/with interviewees.
- A part of the group was able to explore the physical characteristics of questions (what does a questioning face look like, what does a question sound like). Another part of the group dropped out because they could not process the idea at that moment.
- Asking questions to strangers made them curious about the process of doing this in advance: Are people going to react? Will they be friendly? Am I not an intrusive questioner?
- Talking about what a real question is made participants very aware of the wish to pose real questions. They felt confident in doing so.
- Talking about 'questions you do not want to answer' was very intimate, it heightened the familiarity between participants.
- The participants decided to work in small groups. They indicated they needed each others support.
- Talking about what to ask, how to pose a question, and how people could possibly react beforehand helped the participants to prepare. So did watching videos of children asking questions to Freck Vonk.
- Using a (fake) microphone was helpful for some of the

participants. They felt less pressure when behaving like a real interviewer. For others, using the microphone was a bit scary. They felt more pressure when behaving like a real interviewer.

- Watching videos of streetinterviewers asking impertinent questions thrilled the participants, but also frightened them in advance when they heard that they were going outside to ask questions themselves.
  - Going outside was exciting in itself. We never did that with this group, the participants had no routine in how to behave towards each other outside the room at the KFP.
  - Participants came up with very factual questions. Most of the questions related to name, age or shoesize. The answers were collected as treasures.
  - The activity of asking a question to a stranger was almost too exciting for the participants. This was something the participants had almost never done. Wiss (2020, p.43) distinguishes three dangers that can discourage us from asking questions:
    - causing discomfort to another
    - causing our own discomfort
    - causing a conflict
- I think all three of these dangers were felt by the participants. They indicated the fear of being seen as weird, they were clearly discomforted, and they expected the interviewees to be disturbed.
- The participants were able to reflect on their thoughts and feelings following the activity of asking questions to people in public space.

## 4.5 AN EXAMPLE: WHAT IS A QUESTION?

**'Maybe they were nice because we are children'**

**'This was almost too exciting'**

Quotes from participants during Studio Superkracht

## 4.6 RESULTS OF STUDIO SUPERKRACHT

The design of Studio Superkracht has been described in subchapter 4.2. Some results of specific lessons are discussed in subchapters 4.4 and 4.5. What did I notice in general, as results of the design of the situations? What were the effects of the experiments at the KFP on the participants? Below I will reflect on the elements of the situations of Studio Superkracht (as listed in subchapter 4.2), supplemented with some other reflections. The end of this subchapter will address the research questions as applied to Studio Superkracht.

### RECURRING / FAMILIAR ELEMENTS

The recurring elements contributed to a familiar situation. Participants came early if possible, to chat with each other, with me, or to inspect the suitcase.

The group of participants grew relatively close. Getting to know each other was something we took plenty of time for. I wanted to make sure the participants felt comfortable with each other. This worked out very good, participants worked together in different subgroups. Now and then tricky situations occurred, like a participant that repeatedly talked over other participants. These tricky situations could not always be resolved completely, because of behaviour that seemed to be deeply ingrained and therefore kept coming back. But we could talk about it and every participant tried to understand the behaviour and feelings of the others.

### EXPLORE

Adopting a general attitude as an explorer proved to be an important prerequisite for welcoming situations. 'Explore' is mentioned as an element here, but exploration was present in every part of the lessons.

Some concrete examples: acting as a researcher, imagining various views, experimenting with unknown materials, trying out different behaviour, thinking about important elements for the lessons. All options were kept open while trying things out. When the participants had a certain expectation of a try out, they were prepared to expect the unexpected.

I noticed that exploring made the participants constantly converge and diverge; they dived into experiences and took some distance to reflect. This developed their thinking about- and awareness of curiosity and related concepts, and deepened their perception when being curious. They created descriptions of curiosity, and grew aware of how it feels to be curious.

Exploration brought pleasure and curiosity, and ensured an open way of working. Participants clearly experienced that there was no right and wrong. In the words of an observer of one of the lessons: 'Positive atmosphere, the participants seem to be free to express themselves. Also a nice group dynamic' (Observer 1 Studio Superkracht, 2021). The feedback of another observer: 'A very nice lesson to attend, the children are clearly stimulated and enthusiastic.' (Observer 2 Studio Superkracht, 2021)

### REFLECT

Reflection was planned in spoken language, written language and in drawings. We reflected throughout the lessons and at the end of each lesson. The reflections throughout the lessons were more natural, they connected to the ideas we were talking about or acting upon. Reflecting on what we did at the end of the

THEN I WON'T REALLY JUMP  
BUT THE INSIDE OF ME FEELS  
VERY HYPER

## 4.6 RESULTS OF STUDIO SUPERKRACHT



PARTICIPANTS OF STUDIO SUPERKRACHT  
PLAYING THE GAME WE DESIGNED IN LESSON 10

## 4.6 RESULTS OF STUDIO SUPERKRACHT

lesson was difficult, the participants were somewhat impatient.

One of the participants did not speak dutch at home, he had more trouble expressing his thoughts in dutch words (spoken and written language).

*Are you curious sometimes?*

### **'What is curious?'**

Quote from participant with language problem during first lesson  
Studio Superkracht

Sometimes the consequence was less participation and/or less enthusiasm. When reflecting on the forms, participants could choose themselves if they wanted to use words or drawings. But when a certain idea was not clear enough because the spoken language was not totally understood, then reflecting on it was difficult in every form.

### **THEMES OF LESSONS**

In my view, all themes (imagining and zooming in/out, research, titles, doubt, coincidence, failure, questions, boring things, play, various views, contagiousness of curiosity, and obstacles to curiosity) had a clear connection to curiosity. For the participants this differed, it took some time before grasping the connection between curiosity and doubt, failure, and contagiousness.

### **CONNECT TO THE WORLD OF PARTICIPANTS**

I had some ideas of what connected to the world of the participants. Videos, images, and household materials were in my mind. During the first lesson I tried out some videos that showed curious behaviour of animals

and people. Participants were very enthusiast about them. This way, I tried out different materials and noticed what was happily welcomed. We ended up using household materials, craftmaterial, and images and videos of animals and people. The themes of the lessons were related to the lives of the participants through questions and stories. For example, when watching videomaterial about things that can function as an obstacle, we watched a boy singing a song in a supermarket. It made participants think about being seen as weird and how that feels.

**'Sometimes I tell a story to my friend. About something I like. And if she says, 'oh that is really weird', I don't like that. It makes me unsure.'**

Quote from participant during Studio Superkracht

At other times, participants mentioned elements of their lives that I wanted to exclude from the lessons. For instance, almost all of them watched television series 'Squid game'. Participants wanted to talk about it and tried to connect it to the lessons.

**'I'm curious about the people who are dead in squid game.'**

Quote from participant during Studio Superkracht

I told them that television series like that scare me (they do) and that they are obstacles to me: I can't handle a conversation about them.

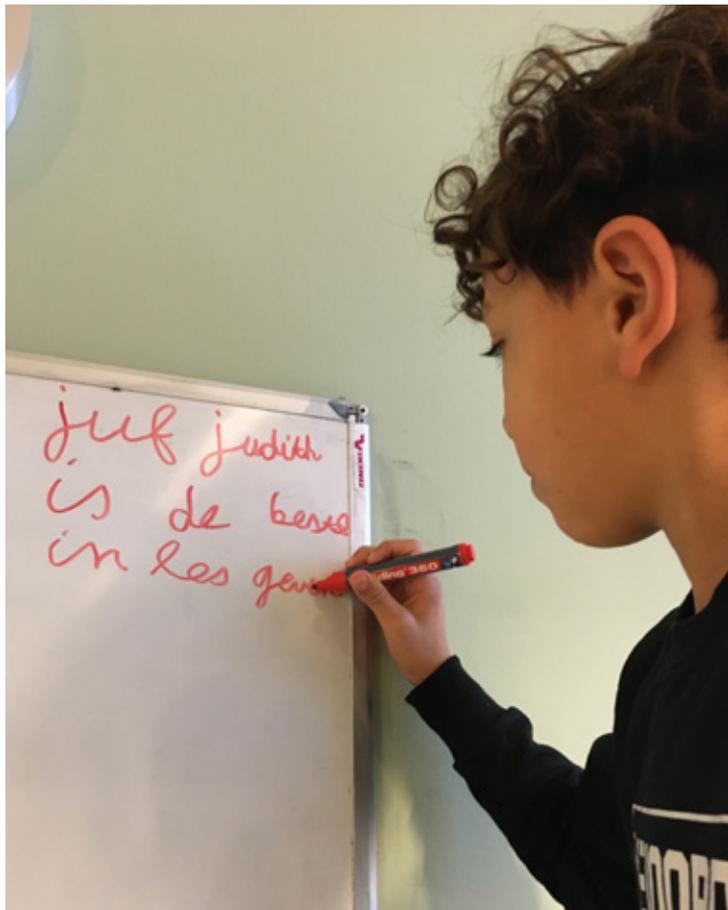
### **NO RIGHT AND WRONG**

Experiencing that there was no right and wrong worked out very stimulating. Participants seemed to feel free to act and talk in their own way, without having to meet

expectations in a certain way.

### PLAY AND FUN

The playful activities brought energy and joy. On the other hand, the alternation of doing something that brought the participants joy, and having to stop this activity for a reflection or the start of a new subject was sometimes difficult. For example, having fun in playing a game they designed could make the participants want to continue playing, instead of gathering as a



PARTICIPANT OF STUDIO SUPERKRACHT  
WRITING 'TEACHER JUDITH IS THE BEST IN TEACHING'

## 4.6 RESULTS OF STUDIO SUPERKRACHT

group and reflecting on what we just did. Overall, the participants enjoyed the 'doing' activities the most.

### MY ROLE

My plan to be a participating researcher did not work out as I thought it would. I soon noticed that inside the structure of the KFP, the group leader is immediately seen as a teacher. My role was a bit unclear to the participants. They repeatedly gave me advice on how to apply strict rules in chaotic situations. They expected me to behave like a teacher.

I felt uncomfortable being seen as a teacher. This was a position I had to avoid, because I wanted to be a co-researcher with the children, and not an omniscient teacher or a teacher that keeps order. At the same time, I did have a lesson plan each week, and material I wanted them to see or use. Being spontaneously described as 'teacher Judith is the best in teaching' was a compliment for the content and method of the activities, but also a disappointment because I did not reach the point of being something else than 'teacher'. Another uneasy element in this compliment was the element of competition. By deciding that there was no right and wrong, I also tried to ban out competition. That worked well in most lessons, but here I was suddenly declared the best in a competition.

### BINDERS AND FORMS

The binders and forms with instructions stimulated the exploring attitude of the participants. Next to the guiding function of the forms in the assignments, writing down their thoughts and ideas made the participants aware of what happened. In some assignments it made them make plans before acting.

## 4.6 RESULTS OF STUDIO SUPERKRACHT

The noted plans made the actions of the participants very determined, and also helped them to reflect on what they did. This gave weight to their actions.

### SMALL STEPS

Overall, I had the impression that the steps in the lessons were of the right size. I did not notice steps that were too small. Sometimes they were too big. For example, in the lesson about the idea of the contagiousness of curiosity, we started with an experiment. We tested how we could infect each other through a handshake with sun block, looking at our hands with blacklight. The next step, translating the idea of contagiousness of curiosity, was a group conversation about the things you are curious about, and if you would like to infect someone else with your curiosity for this thing. Later, the participants were drawing this infection: how do they visualize such an infection? I noticed that for some of the participants the steps were too big, this idea was too abstract and would have profited from some extra steps.

### INSTITUTE: STUDIO SUPERKRACHT

The institute of Studio Superkracht was accepted by the participants without any question. They talked about it as if it had been there forever. The use of the institute made it easier for myself to see the importance of what we did. Because it strengthened my attitude as a researcher in the institute, this was transferred to the participants. The official materials like stickers with 'Studio Superkracht', the use of titles, microphones and measuring tools were very popular. I guess introducing and gifting these items contributed to the excitement of unexpected things that could happen.

### THINGS THAT WERE ALLOWED

Sometimes there was permission to do things that were not allowed on other moments in the lives of the participants. Participants felt safe when the allowed behaviour was a relatively small deviation, like walking over the chairs. When the deviation felt bigger, like smashing an apple with a hammer and dirty the floor by doing that, it made participants feel uncertain. For me it was also a bit unclear as I had to decide on the go about things.

A few examples:

- In one of the lessons we were making up stories about clothespins. One of the participants probably tried to impress the group by making up a story about two clothespins having sex. But in this moment, in my opinion it totally fitted the situation. It could potentially be a very interesting story. I said that his story could be an interesting possibility. He was startled and did not want to go on with that story.
- The lesson in which we were doing research on an apple allowed everything that could be done with an apple, besides hurting yourself or another, or destroying something else than an apple.
- One lesson was about coincidence. We started out making a game with a dice. The children came up with the assignments: what to do when we throw 1, or 2, etcetera. The assignment 'stand on the table' was very popular. They also suggested 'jump on the table'. There I felt a limit, because they could possibly damage the table or could easily fall off.

### THE UNKNOWN

Relating to the unknown or to unpredictability has been a recurring element in every lesson. We included the unknown by talking and doing. For example, when

## 4.6 RESULTS OF STUDIO SUPERKRACHT

exploring the notion of a protector, who keeps you from doing dangerous things, the participants walked over chairs and imagined scary things beneath those chairs. And when exploring the concept of coincidence, we questioned beliefs of the participants. Is it a coincidence if you think of someone and a minute later you meet that person? Why? Or why not? How many possibilities are there for meeting people, for things to happen? Why do we see it as magic when two people roll the same number on their dice? Most of these uncertain elements stayed within the range of 'a bit alarming but tolerable'. The activity of asking questions to strangers was scary, it made participants feel unsafe.

The suitcase that contained a secret each week was a very joyful uncertain element. Participants were very eager to know what was in the suitcase. They kept asking me what was in there and tried to peek through the cracks of the wooden suitcase, although they understood that the pleasure of the surprise would be less if they would know what was in the suitcase.

*When on your way to Studio Superkracht, are you curious in advance already?*

**'Yes! In particular about what's in the suitcase'**

**'What's in the suitcase today?'**

*So you are very curious what's inside the suitcase.*

*Do you want me to tell you what's inside?*

**'No!'**

*Quotes from participants during Studio Superkracht*

Opening the suitcase turned out to be a desirable task. The participants requested a fair way of deciding who could open the suitcase. We made a scheme by pulling

straws with a date, to decide which participant could open the suitcase in which week. Most of the lessons were structured in such a way that the suitcase would be opened halfway through the lesson.

The setting of the room and the activities changed every lesson: sometimes we needed chairs and tables. At other times we sat on the ground, or we had to walk over the chairs, we needed the central space of the building (a general space) of the KFP, we changed the room into a board game, or we went outside. The flexible elements contributed to a slight disarrangement.

### **AWARENESS**

Creating awareness was an important goal that was aimed for by the combination of all the other elements. It is not necessary for experiencing curiosity, but it is helpful to understand curiosity.

Awareness of curiosity in general has made the participants realize that curiosity is a very powerful driver of exploring behaviour. It has also introduced them to the relation between curiosity and related elements as getting interested, being enthusiast, asking questions, doing research, coincidence, doubt.

Awareness of their own curiosity (how it feels, in which situations you grow curious, what can block your curiosity, how you can infect others with your curiosity, how something that bores you could be transformed in something that makes you very curious) helped the participants to understand how their own curiosity functions.

## 4.6 RESULTS OF STUDIO SUPERKRACHT

The returning dialogue about the contents of the suitcase felt like a ritual. It also raised awareness: participants realized that their curiosity in this situation was something very pleasant, and that they preferred to stay in this pleasant state until the moment someone would open the suitcase.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS & STUDIO SUPERKRACHT

- How can situations be created (at the KFP, with children aged 8 -10) in which curiosity feels welcome?

The basic requirements that curiosity needs are time, energy, safety, and uncertainty. At Studio Superkracht, the situation was designed in such a way that participants had a role as explorers/researchers. The themes and activities were described in such a way that there was no right and wrong.

- What can block the entrance of curiosity? (at the KFP, with children aged 8 -10)

A knowledge gap that is too big or too small can block the entrance of curiosity. Habits and grooves can also try to keep us in their ingrained path, and not explore what is unknown. Most obstacles, habits and grooves relate to a possible danger. At Studio Superkracht, participants mentioned social dangers like 'being seen as weird' and physical dangers as 'you could fall' or 'you could be injured'.

- What was the effect of the experiments at the KFP on the participants? This has been elaborated throughout this subchapter and will be summarized in the next chapter: conclusions.

- Can we define curiosity together?

The KFP asked for a definition of curiosity. I still stand by the definition that is mentioned on page 30 of this thesis: 'A strong desire to pursue something which is partly new, unknown, or unpredictable. Being curious often leads to exploration and inquisitive thinking.'

The statements of the participants of Studio Superkracht are consistent with this definition.

**'That you want to know a lot about something'**

**'When new things are going to happen'**

**'Imagine, I'm curious about this suitcase, then I want to know a lot about it; what is it, what's in it?'**

**'When I want to learn new things'**

**'That you want to do something, that you want to know a lot about it'**

**'That you want to know a lot about something, and that you are thinking about it'**

**'That you really want to know something'**

Quotes from participants during Studio Superkracht

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Let's go back to the beginning of this research. In my practices as an artist/educator, one of my goals is to design situations in which it is easy for participants to get into a curious state. This curious state creates space for participants to explore, space to try out various views (existing views or imagined views). The intuitive approach I have been using to enable a curious state raised some questions: Why should I design situations in which participants can easily grow curious? Is this really something to strive for? And if so, how to do that? I realized that curiosity cannot be forced to occur. It had to be invited somehow. Which elements would be helpful in creating these situations?

As far as theory goes, I found that the positive effects of curiosity have been amply proven. Quite by accident I came into contact with an organization that was also interested in exploring curiosity: the Kinderfaculteit Pendrecht (KFP).

The KFP had their own questions: 'How to define curiosity? And what are incentives that can enhance curiosity?' (Peteroff, 2021). I accepted their invitation to design a series of lessons on curiosity for children. This would allow me to create test situations in which I would try to welcome curiosity. My further demands for this series were that the lessons should be enjoyable and that the concepts should be understandable to the young participants. Also, I aimed for a certain awareness of curiosity to develop. As for myself, I had the intention to be a researcher together with the participants. We would explore curiosity together.

This created an entanglement of questions, demands and roles. Meanwhile, I was so fascinated by the

subject of curiosity that I wanted to include as much as I could in this research. I kept seeing new connections: with conversations, films, newspaper articles, daily life, research and practices of others, with everything. This multitude of questions, focus points and interesting material did become a problem. I was drowning in curiosity. The series of lessons started and I did not clearly choose what to do. Instead of choosing, I included all of the questions, focus points and demands. That brings us directly to the limitations of my research.

### LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

In hindsight, I realize that I have done too much and have been too general. The search for theories and views could have been more focussed, especially on the design of welcoming situations. The series would have benefitted from more time (more lessons or less subjects). That way, some steps could have been smaller when needed, and participants could have reflected more during and after activities. On these moments reflection connects naturally to the experiences. Reflection at the end of a lesson could have been more creative. Instead of talking about what we did in that lesson, we could have drawn, or we could have used another short workform.

In this series, I was not able to adapt the lessons for the participant who was used to another language. Had I realized this in time, I could have planned some extra time with this participant in advance, and in between lessons if needed. Also, language itself could have had a role in the series, and the assignments could have been adapted in some way. This issue relates to the supposed unequal accessibility of curiosity, which

would be a very interesting topic to explore further.

Another limitation of the research is that I have only my own observations for interpretation (and those of two visiting observers). I used forms, but only for the exploration of participants. I could have included some forms that more objectively captured the participants' experiences. A follow-up to the series could try to capture the experiences of the participants more systematically through regular interviews with participants, their parents and the teachers at their Primary Schools.

My role towards the participants of Studio Superkracht did not work out as planned. In the end, I think the participants saw me as a very strange but interesting teacher, and that's a situation I can live with.

### **DISENTANGLE**

So how did I proceed, having done too much and having collected a huge amount of experiences and images? During the process of writing, I decided to stay close to my original question: In which situations does curiosity feel welcome?

What has the research accomplished? I will go into that question for the various parties involved.

### **THE PARTICIPANTS**

Studio Superkracht enabled participants to experience curiosity, enabled them to learn about curiosity and enabled them to become aware of their own curiosity. The experiments stimulated joyful exploration in a situation in which there was no right and wrong. Their notion of related concepts as coincidence, failure,

questions, doubt and various views was deepened. Participants were introduced to their own blocks to curiosity, and to why these blocks could exist. They gave meaning to their experiences (within Studio Superkracht but also in daily life) through reflecting on what happened. What did they think about what happened? What suited them, as a member of a group and as an individual? How could things be totally different for someone else? (See the quote on page 116)

### **THE KFP / EDUCATIONAL SITUATIONS**

Feedback of Jiska Peteroff from the KFP said: 'I think we know a lot more thanks to your lessons, but it's hard to describe what it is. The awareness process is important. Students have learned about themselves: 'What makes me curious? What am I afraid of?' If we are going to apply something like this, the teachers must first be involved in such a process, then the students. Let's keep in touch, we're in an investigation phase, we're considering everything' (Peteroff, 2022).

The KFP could use this research in different ways. I suspect that many teachers at the KFP already develop exciting situations, intuitively or consciously. It might be very interesting for teachers and other staff of the KFP to attend a presentation about my research. The effect could be to develop more awareness of the designability of the situation you teach in. Next to that, the theory and the experiments of this research could inspire teachers to choose elements they would like to try out.

The KFP could work together with the 4 Primary Schools in Pendrecht, and introduce curiosity as an important theme there. Post (2019, p. 19) argues that

I LIKE READING BOOKS VERY MUCH. WHEN I HEAR THERE IS A NEW BOOK IT EXITES ME. IMAGINE THAT SOMEONE DOES NOT LIKE READING BOOKS AT ALL, THEN A NEW BOOK DOES NOT INTEREST THAT PERSON. BUT I'M REALLY CURIOUS ABOUT IT.

HOW COULD BEING CURIOUS BE TOTALLY DIFFERENT FOR SOMEONE ELSE?

QUOTE FROM PARTICIPANT STUDIO SUPERKRACHT

'curiosity-focused pedagogy should explicitly aim at cultivating a positive classroom climate in which children value the educational importance of posing epistemic questions and ideas, derive pleasure from being curious learners, and perceive that their teachers appreciate their curiosities.' I agree with this statement and suggest extending it to curiosity in general. No differentiation between 'epistemic' curiosity and 'non-epistemic' curiosity enables an explorative attitude towards everything. As mentioned earlier (*This thesis*, p. 35): In my view, learning can happen through any question, any experience, and at any age, and need not be related only to formal educational settings and subjects.

The importance of the 'not necessarily useful curiosity' has been expressed beautifully by Abraham Flexner (Founder of Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton): 'Curiosity, which may or may not eventuate in something useful, is probably the outstanding characteristic of modern thinking. [...] It must be absolutely unhampered' (Flexner, 1939, p. 545). The bottom line is that curiosity should be the guiding principle in collecting what seems interesting, regardless of its usefulness. Bodewes (2021) rightly indicates that focus of attention should direct curiosity: 'In certain periods it can be very good to let your curiosity go in all directions, but at a certain point you will have to focus your attention again.'

It would be very interesting to try out free time related situations like Studio Superkracht inside a more formal learning environment as a school. Situations like Studio Superkracht could link curiosity to everything, including what has to be learned in school and which obstacles

are being perceived. Inside situations in which curiosity feels welcome, students could experience curiosity, learn about curiosity, and could grow more aware of their own (obstacles to) curiosity. One step further would be to focus more on trait curiosity within these situations, and to connect free time subjects and questions of any kind to formal school subjects.

My work as an artist/educator does not ask or aim for a certain group of participants. Participants could be any group. Projects are adapted to this group. I have been working with children in this research, because I stumbled upon the KFP and this seemed to be an excellent situation to do my research in. I don't aspire a role as a teacher and I am averse to managing a classroom. If there will be future projects linked to educational situations, I will have to find a way to 'undefine' my role. I can also imagine being an advisor for related projects, in institutions such as the KFP or in schools.

#### **OTHERS**

Other people or organisations, such as companies or institutions, can also benefit from experimenting with situations that welcome curiosity. My recent project 'Moments for impossibilities' was made for a presentation in cultural institution 'Tent' in Rotterdam. This presentation (the public presentation of the graduation projects of the Master Education in Arts) was a first step in practicing the designability of your own moments as a participant. The 'Moments' mentioned in the title can be seen as mini-situations in which curiosity feels welcome. I would like to follow up on this idea in other places.

**JUDITH VAN DEN BERG**

This research has enabled me to answer the main research question for my own practices. Curiosity feels welcome in a safe, familiar situation where at the same time something is uncertain or unpredictable. My way of realizing this is by creating situations in which it is very clear that there is no right and wrong, and in which the main goal is to explore. Often these situations are fictional institutes or -events with a special name, a piece of furniture that is a central point, or other elements that make it feel official.

When thinking about this, I realized that the frequent use of institutions, titles, and furniture in my work creates new situations in which there is no expectation of a certain behaviour known from other situations. The officiality gives the new situation the right to exist, and gives participants the freedom to explore freely. Not only do I think that others can feel free to explore in these situations, I also feel free myself in newly created situations without expectations.

For example, writing this thesis has not always felt free. Although my supervisors assured me that there was no right or wrong when writing my thesis, I sometimes felt blocked. The Master Education in Arts has strict requirements for the research and the thesis that make up this program. Others (friends, family, colleagues, the KFP) also expected certain things of my research.

I did not realize the role of hindering expectations before, and I'm glad to understand this part of my practice. Of course, there are some basic behavioral expectations that I would like to stick to, such as being kind, listening to each other, putting time and energy

into the situation. And of course a new or totally open situation cannot be created everywhere. But I am convinced of the importance of new situations like Studio Superkracht: they can give space to explore freely, and they can help create a welcoming situation for curiosity.

These realisations come with many others about my practices: I now understand the nature of it more than I did before. My preference for different titles, slight disarrangement, site-specific work, attractive or enigmatic furniture, and various views make more sense to me now. My intuitive way of working has been strengthened by reading, experimenting, and thinking. Luckily, this has not affected the intuition itself. I intend to use it as before, combined with the new knowledge and experience I have gained.

## EPILOGUE

### SEARCH FOR MANY WAYS

Looking back on my hitchhike trips, I see that I did not step into a such a situation, but created it. In order to be recognized and picked up as a hitchhiker, I stood near the road, chose a handy spot where people could stop easily, and picked a daylight moment. The cardboard sign made the situation official, my smile tried to express that I was trustworthy.

Thanks for having been my hitchhiker. I hope the glimpse of many ways has been a pleasure to you.



ZOEK DE WEG (SUPERDUO 2022)

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## IMAGES

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