



DEAR FRIEND, I have been thinking about you these past weeks while taking a course for university teachers, reading a book by the late bell hooks, and grading papers. Somehow 2022

has started strong on an academic note. I guess I am a teacher. I never planned it. Mentioning the lecturer title still makes my stomach squeeze, although I have thrown myself into it all. The very beginning of working at the art academy was rather accidental and—let me be honest—a way to safely return to the motherland. This does not mean that I was not interested. I told you back then that I was keen. I wanted to teach and somehow thought that it provides time for reflection. This was a bit blue-eyed of me but it has provided this and, strangely enough, changed me as a human being.

This temporary phase in education has grown into about five years so far. The first year was full of events for which I was never prepared for professionally, pedagogically, psychologically... I hope that enough time has passed to mention the trauma of seeing someone performing their first performance while intentionally harming themselves physically... or responding to aggressive student emails about what the staff was doing wrong. These are some wild interactions engraved in my memory as they welcomed me into this academic life. I felt I was in the middle, trying to navigate between students and administration and found a chasm between it all. Somehow these major issues resolved themselves to some extent, and possibly something larger was pushed into the process after these and some other events as today there is an ethical code and committee.

Younger teachers ask questions once or twice every semester that relate to students' wellbeing, and these bring back the memory of that first year. We are calmer these days. I hope this calmness does not offend you. We care. There is some experience, yet there is a lot to do in terms of preparing us to respond to mental health questions, learning difficulties, next to trying to do a good lecture or engaging seminar, which is also not something that happens easily. Sometimes it does not happen. My dear colleague said that teaching is where one day you are feeling on top, that it flows and you might be thinking that you are starting to get it, and then the next day you are reminded with a kick in the ass that no, it is not so easily achievable. The word humility starts to look and sound different. We are teaching and learning, as they say, and although students need our support, they also want us to challenge them. It sounds like writer bell hooks sits among us: "They want and demand more from professors than my generation did. There are times when I walk into classrooms overflowing with students who feel terribly wounded in their psyche (many of them see therapists), yet I do not think that they want therapy from me. They do want an education that is healing to the uninformed, unknowing spirit. They do want knowledge that is meaningful."* Preparing courses makes the reality both messy and exciting. There is no lecture or course that I can pull out of my sleeve or refer to my good old memory, let alone think of healing anyone. I sit with the books, reading and researching to understand the things that I plan to share until late hours. It probably

shows but that is where I am, growing together with you, navigating the worlds of education, design history, pedagogy, and more, and then back to the classroom.

One of the interesting aspects is our age gap. It is not that big, although it is indeed growing every year. What I am learning and seeing is the fabric of the next generation. I wish I had a similar experience with older generations, a chance to understand them as a collective. The young today that I see are braver, more worldly, open, self-confident, demanding than we ever were with our teachers (or at least than I was). I wish I had called out a lecturer about not providing any titles with hundreds of artworks that she was clicking through in a minute on a slide projector and expecting us to memorize it all, or another teacher making remarks about someone's low intelligence. It was not all bad, not at all, but I see that some young teachers challenge themselves more. They want to reach the student and not only bathe in their own knowledge. Education as it seems is not only sharing facts and ideas, but connecting through the field that we are both interested in. I cannot say that I manage any of my expectations and can only promise that they are there.

I have also noticed that I was privileged to have had the time to be young—to make mistakes and explore—during my studies. I don't think this is the case often right now. Most of our younger students work one or two jobs next to a full-time program. Last year in a seminar where we discussed neoliberalism and its effects on art education, one student mentioned that her dream is to have a place to live, food, and a fine job. It was beautiful and sad at once. None of their dreams sounded as grand and utopian as mine.

Today my dreams are more humble as well. Days in education can be long, and many teachers are often overworked. However, our time is regularly filled with fascinating people, discussions, presentations, lectures, seminars, the many texts we read, and so on. Everything accumulates and creates a point for reflection. Design and/or art education is a context that lets you evolve. It seems to me also quite definite that the field of education makes you aware of the society you live in in more ways than you hope or expect. It doesn't let you stay too long in any comfortable corner, and although it can be distressing, I am also grateful for that. (Design) education is empowering.

ALL MY BEST,
SANDRA NUUT