

# The Art of Teaching

Peter Wanzenried



Teaching as an art:  
I step into the foreground  
tell stories, express, shape  
Giving importance  
to my essential ideas  
I am present and authentic  
announcing my message

Teaching as an art:  
I step into the background  
take care, stimulate, support  
Giving importance  
to all my students  
I mindfully and attentively understand  
what they have recognized

Teaching as an art:  
I step into the circle  
participate, pick up, contribute  
Giving importance  
to the community  
I give freedom and safety  
through my participation

Teaching as an art:  
I step out of the circle  
Frame, control, set limits  
Giving importance  
to our work  
I make clear with no doubts  
what has to be done

Teaching as a dance  
to find a new balance  
day by day

**M**y teaching is a dance with four different aspects that I have to bring into balance wherever I teach. How does this work at EGS?

I like to take my place in the foreground and go on stage to give lectures. When I feel that my theories reach the students, when they understand that my stories and pictures are based on my personal experiences, teaching becomes an important part of my life. At EGS it is really a gift to have the opportunity to contribute in this way to our shared framework.

But then it is important to find the right moment to step back and give space to the students, to become silent, supporting with all my awareness their arriving work. My patience is now the most important teaching-competence. EGS is a wonderful place where I may become a beginner again and again. How to esteem all the different approaches to the arts? How to help every student to find their own way? How to take part in their searching and finding? How to become satisfied with all the different shapes I never expected and to really appreciate diversity? All my presence is important—without doing anything else.

The most important difference in teaching at EGS and anywhere else lies in my belonging to a real community of students and teachers. Every year coming to Saas Fee gives me an opportunity to step into a new circle. For example, our experience in community art is a miraculous possibility for new encounters with people I know for many years and

others I will only see once. We all teach and learn at the same time.

But then it becomes so hard to step out of this wonderful feeling and dare to say, “No!”, when it becomes important, when I have to take my role as a guardian. This becomes necessary if a student does not respect the norms of community life, does not take care of the feelings of others, of her effect on the community as a whole, of the diversity of our cultural backgrounds, of the nature around us. This happened rarely at EGS, but I remember moments when I had to pluck up my courage and run the risk of confrontation. And exactly these situations make it clear that my most difficult students are actually my most important teachers.



**Peter Wanzenried** is a Professor of Education at a teachers training college in Switzerland and has also taught at EGS. He is the author of *Spielräume für Bildung* and *Unterrichten als Kunst*. He has been an actor in Playback-

Theater for more than 20 years, currently with “Theaterimpuls” and “Ensemble der närrischen Alten” in Switzerland.

Artwork by Brigitte Wanzenried.