

## IN CONVERSATION:

# WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW TO GET STARTED?

---

Key:

**MR:** Manisha Ramlal (university student, Leiden University)

**AS:** Astrid Schouten (teacher, OBS de Voorsprong, The Hague)

**TB:** Tanja Bos (policy advisor, Leiden University)

**MR:** My name is Manisha Ramlal, I am a second year psychology student at Leiden University and since October I have been working at OBS Voorsprong as part of the Studenten voor Educatie project.

**AS:** My name is Astrid Schouten and I work at de Voorsprong in the Schilderswijk.

**TB:** My name is Tanja Bos, I'm a policy advisor at Leiden University and I'm interested in ways we can get our students to work on social challenges. So I am very curious to know what you did here Manisha.

**MR:** Yes, I have been working here since October and I help in four nursery classes. I help students who have language deficits or who need extra help with the figures and then the teachers tell me which students these are and then I go and talk to them separately and give them support.

**TB:** And you study psychology, but you didn't necessarily plan to work in education?

**MR:** No, I happened to see a vacancy on the Leiden University website and it seemed interesting and it is for 12 hours a week, so at the time I could easily combine it with my studies. And then I applied and then I found out more about the work and what you were going to do exactly and I also thought it was meaningful work: you are going to help students and actually more from that point of view I wanted to work here.

**TB:** And how was it to get Manisha to join the class?

**AS:** Yes, of course that's very nice. There are of course so many shortages of teachers and support staff, so any help that comes along we grab with both hands and any attention is really great for the children.

**TB:** And how was it, the first day you came to work here?



**MR:** I was very nervous. I think I was more nervous for the children than they were for a new teacher. I was also quite shocked that there are certain children who have such a language deficiency. I am not used to that. I come from Brabant, so you don't see that often and here you really end up in the Schilderswijk and you have to deal with such cases more often. So I had to get used to that and in the beginning I did a lot of observing. To see how the teachers were doing and what I could learn from them and take away with me.

**TB:** I can imagine that you still had to learn a lot about how to help these children.

**MR:** Yes, indeed. I didn't know how to teach children at all, how to teach children something. It's not as simple as saying you'll read it and remember what one to ten is and so on. So that took some getting used to and I also asked a lot of advice from the teachers, like what can I do and how should I teach them and how can I practice with them. Eventually we started playing games and practicing counting from different games. This makes it much easier and more fun and it also helps me to understand what my pupils need and how I can keep them on task.

**TB:** How was that for you? Then someone comes to help, but they might not have the right knowledge or skills yet.

**AS:** No, but if you are not familiar with the profession it is all a bit new, but she is a young person and from the University, so she picks things up quickly, takes advice and has a natural calmness and builds it up well by first observing, asking advice and in principle now she can start by herself. So that is very nice.

**TB:** So even though you have to help her a bit in the beginning, it's also worth a lot.

**AS:** And now you are reaping the benefits of that.

**TB:** And, do you think any student could do this?

**MR:** I think so. You have to be open to working with children of course, and it also depends on what kind of children, because this is the Schilderswijk of course, here you come across more problems, very different of course. I think if you just like working with children and if you think it's good work to teach children, then I would definitely recommend it, because apart from the fact that I like the work, it also makes me feel good and it is really meaningful work when you see, for example, that a child who first couldn't do one to ten and now suddenly can do one to twenty, so it are very small steps, but that is very important for these children to be able to move on to group 3 and that is just great if I can contribute something to that.

**TB:** And when you finish, do you think you will have learned things, gained skills that you might apply in your later work?

**MR:** Yes, it's very... children are not yet at a certain age that they can indicate what they find difficult or what's on their minds, so to observe that and then pick it up... I'll take that with me in any case, especially in my psychology study it was a nice development that I could take with me and that I'll also take with me, and to teach the students something in the first place, small children, and how you can tackle that, I didn't know that before, so if I want to do something with children one day. I am now more inclined to focus on child psychology and to work with small children. I didn't have that before.

**TB:** So it has also broadened your view of your own field a little.

**MR:** Yes, that's right.

**TB:** And do you think it matters what her background is in terms of study? I can imagine that psychology has some common ground with the work, but could a physics student or a language student? Do you think that matters?



**AS:** It's what Manisha also says: I think you have to be interested in it and I don't think it really matters which study you come from. But if you don't like children or think 'yuck', you know, then I don't think it's suitable, but if you come from university and you have a certain level of education, then I don't think it matters which field you come from.

**TB:** So as far as that is concerned, it is broadly applicable.

**MR:** There was a meeting in December of Students for Education and I spoke to several students there and there was also a student who did something with Physics, I don't know exactly what it was, and she is also working from Students for Education with group 8 where she can take her education to group 8 and teach the students about different subjects concerning Physics, so it is quite special. I didn't expect it myself, but there are several students from different disciplines who are also involved in this project.

**TB:** And Manisha, how did you know what you were matched up to?

**MR:** Yes, the student coordinator had already told me which school I would be working at and which target group, so which classes, and she had also already informed me about the situation: the school is in the schilderswijk, there might be language deficits, so I was prepared for that. And I could also indicate in advance where my preferences lay, so am I open to being placed from group 1 to 8 or do I really only want to be placed with group 8 or with group 1 or 2, so I could clearly indicate where I would like to be placed and once a place became available I was well informed about that and then later there was an introductory interview with Astrid and I was nervous but it just went really well.

**TB:** And after that you could say: I like this?

**MR:** Yes, both Astrid and I could tell, which was nice.

**TB:** And now I am interested in what we can roll out more broadly within the University, we are investigating, what has worked very well for you in this programme?

**AS:** What worked very well for us was the number of hours that the student was available. 12 hours divided over four groups so that worked out very well and you can really do something because you are present in the group for a part of the day and that was a real godsend for us.

**TB:** So that matched very well.

**AS:** Yes, it matched very well.

**MR:** What worked very well for me as a student was that I could indicate very well what I wanted, so in terms of hours and supply and demand could match very well and I also noticed that, thanks to a meeting that took place at Students for Education, the project gives a lot of freedom so that the students themselves can look at what appeals to them and what they can add from their education. That was very nice for me and I can include my own education in this, but someone else can also include a completely different type of education. So you can express that wish.

**TB:** So you can say what you want and what is possible?

**MR:** Yes, exactly. Based on that, you do get good opportunities indeed.

**TB:** Okay, well I have learned a lot more so thank you very much for your information.

**AS:** and **MR:** You're welcome.

