

*Das*  
Lehrerzimmer



*cinéart*

# PERSMAP



Drama - 2023 - Duitsland - 98 minuten  
Bioscooprelease: 16 november 2023

**Meer over de film:**

**Persmaterialen:**

[Cineart.nl/films/das-lehrerzimmer](https://www.cineart.nl/films/das-lehrerzimmer)

[Cineart.nl/pers/das-lehrerzimmer](https://www.cineart.nl/pers/das-lehrerzimmer)

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# Synopsis

De Duitse film *DAS LEHRERZIMMER* is een meeslepend schoolklasdrama, waarin regisseur Ilker Çatak een morele strijd toont over grenzen en rechtvaardigheid die thrillerachtige proporties aanneemt.

Wanneer er sprake lijkt te zijn van diefstal op een middelbare school, neemt de directie ingrijpende maatregelen om de dader te vinden. Lerares Carla Novak (Leonie Benesch) werkt sinds kort als docent op de school en zet vraagtekens bij deze aanpak. Als ze zelf ontdekt wie de vermeende dader is, zet ze iets in gang wat ook grote gevolgen heeft voor zichzelf. Hoe ver ga je voor de waarheid?

Actrice Leonie Benesch zet een indrukwekkende prestatie neer als Carla Novak. De film won de Duitse Filmprijzen voor (onder andere) Beste Film, Beste Regie en Beste Actrice, en is de Duitse Oscarinzending van dit jaar.





A close-up portrait of Ilker Çatak, a man with dark hair and a slight stubble, looking directly at the camera. He is wearing a dark-colored shirt. The background is dark and out of focus.

Director: Ilker Çatak

## Ilker Çatak - filmography

### Feature films

2023	DAS LEHRERZIMMER
2021	RÄUBERHÄNDE
2019	ES GILT DAS GESPROCHENE WORT
2017	ES WAR EINMAL INDIANERLAND

## A Conversation with Ilker Çatak

**“The process of a self-written film is always a journey into the unknown”**

### **How do you remember your school days?**

My memories are mostly beautiful. I was always very good at school. I went to high school in Germany until the seventh grade, then moved to Istanbul with my parents. My school years there were formative, which has to do with growing up, the adolescent years. I was confronted with a completely different school system. We wore uniforms, learned to tie a tie, but also felt like we were in a kind of cocoon as students at the German school. The city was wild. It was an exciting time to graduate from high school as a teenager in Istanbul at the turn of the millennium.

### **To what extent did your own school experiences shape your new film? Was there a specific event that could be described as the starting point for the project?**

There were two boys in our class who, during their free periods, went to classes that were in physical education. And then they stole from the jackets and pockets of these students. This went on for quite a while. We all knew about it, but we didn't say anything because

nobody wanted to be a tattletale. I remember very clearly when one day - we were sitting in physics class - three teachers came in and said, «All girls out, all boys wallets on the table!» The memory of that incident came up when Johannes and I were on one of our vacations together. At the time, I told how my parents' cleaning lady had been caught stealing. Johannes then told me about his sister, who works as a math teacher. There was

an incident at her school where thefts were committed in the teachers' lounge. This conversation took us back to our school days, and we thought: This could be an exciting story.





## **How did you research today's school operations?**

First, I went to my old high school in Berlin, where the principal, who even remembered me, welcomed me with open arms. Actually, I wanted to shoot there, but that didn't work out due to funding. This principal supported us in the development of the script just as much as Johannes' sister. All in all, we had intensive conversations with a good dozen people from various educational fields, with teachers, principals, school psychologists and sports teachers, who explained teambuilding measures to us, some of which can be seen in the film.

## **What has changed compared to your own school days?**

What we experienced back then, of teachers just coming in and going through purses, would not exist today. This was confirmed to us in our research. However, such a procedure would be permitted if it were added that the action was voluntary. That's why the subordinate clause «The whole thing is voluntary, but if you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear» is mentioned more often in our film. Of course, this is totally perfidious, because such a process does not take place at eye level between teachers and students. What has changed compared to my school days is, above all, the type of communication. Today there are WhatsApp groups, parents exchange information with each other. The lines of communication are much shorter. When a problem arises, it is addressed more quickly. I also have the feeling that parents today appear with a different self-confidence, especially those who send their children to «better» schools.

## **How did you develop the script with Johannes Duncker? How did the collaboration take shape?**

Johannes and I had the basic idea, in which our producer Ingo Fliess encouraged us. Ingo sent us to a forest house three or four times for a week each time, so we had



a concentrated environment. There we took lots of walks, had conversations, thought about how the film should feel, what we wanted to tell, what social issues we wanted to address. After these retreats, we came home with a bag full of ideas and transferred them to our respective laptops - Johannes in Cologne, me in Berlin - into a shared document that evolved into the script.

### **What was your particular focus in developing the story? What was important to you, what were you concerned with?**

It is about a system, about a reflection of our society. School is a good playing field because it shows our society as a microcosm, as a model: There is the head of state, ministers, a press organ, the people... But DAS LEHRERZIMMER negotiates many different topics. A central aspect for me is finding the truth, the search for truth, or how one comes to believe in the truth. The question of what one believes in is also posed. The boy wants to believe in his mother, she wants to believe in justice. Fake news, cancel culture or, for example, the need of every society for a scapegoat - these are further themes.

### **How did you go about developing the characters? How quickly was the character cosmos decided?**

We knew that we had a class and a staff, a teacher as the main character, a secretary. So we wrote a handful of teachers and a handful of students into the script. When casting the class, I realized relatively quickly that every child in the classroom is important. I didn't want to divide the kids into those who had role names and those who were extras. We built the class as a collective, with the motto: We all pull together, everyone is equally important. We all play along. Even if some kids didn't have lines, everyone should have the opportunity to contribute. With regard to the adult roles, Johannes and I wrote characters that we felt like and for which our casting director Simone Bär (who passed away some days ago...) made great casting suggestions. That's how we formed our ensemble.

### **Leonie Benesch plays the leading role. Why was she the right one?**

I remember that we had a photo wall with faces of actors in our forest house. The photo of Leonie Benesch was there from the beginning. Long before we had asked her. I always imagined the film with Leonie because I had appreciated her work for years. Even though we did another casting, it was clear to me very quickly: she is my Carla Nowak.

### **Who is Carla Nowak?**

Carla Nowak is exactly what the audience gets from her in the film, what they see, what they interpret into her. We deliberately didn't show any private life. Neither do we show what car she drives, nor where she lives, nor whether she has a boyfriend. These things don't play a role. There were definitely discussions beforehand because there were people who wanted to know more about her. But I never wavered from my conviction. It doesn't matter at all whether Carla Nowak has a pet or colored walls in her apartment. A person's character always reveals itself in difficult moments of decision. When the.

person is under stress, when they have to deal with problems. With this premise in mind, I put the character in Leonie's hands. I have rarely had to communicate with an actress on set as little as I did with Leonie. Her first offering was always so good that I hardly had to make any corrections.

### **What was important to you in casting the other characters?**

The ensemble is also very much thanks to Simone Bär. She always said to me that there were so many great actors and actresses and that we should make sure that no one stood out from the cast. I thought that was the right approach for this film, because I see it as a collective work. With the character of Thomas Liebenwerda, I thought it was exciting to cast a person of color. I talked to Michael Klammer about how absurd it actually is to then accuse someone like Liebenwerda of racism. But we live in absurd times and somehow the film was also an attempt to depict this confusion of our time. You just have to go to Twitter. Rafael Stachowiak came on board because I wanted an actor who spoke Polish. Like Michael Klammer, he is a very theater-savvy actor. The idea of Carla Nowak's Polish background came to me because I had an experience with a Turkish colleague who consistently answered me in German when I addressed her in Turkish. Something about that bugged me. I do understand when there are several people in the room and that's why you don't speak in a foreign language because you don't want to be rude. I put this situation in DAS LEHRERZIMMER with Carla Nowak and Milosz Dudek. It's about assimilation, about not wanting to be noticed, about being ashamed of one's own origins. Eva Löbau, who can be seen as the school secretary, is simply a phenomenon for me. She can be incredibly fragile and funny at the same time. I could watch her all day. But also Sarah Bauerett, Anne Kathrin Gummich and Kathrin Wehlisch. They're great colleagues. I'm very grateful for this great ensemble.

### **How did you manage to make the class, the everyday school life you captured seem so authentic?**

On this shoot, I always took three quarters of an hour in the morning to talk to my ensemble and the children. About all kinds of things, about dreams, about fears, identity, shame... I wanted to take out the pressure that comes with a day of shooting. Meanwhile, my shooting team waited outside, and my DP Judith Kaufmann often got impatient because she wanted to take advantage of the daylight, which of course is only available to a limited extent during a shoot in November. But these conversations were important to me. I wanted to have a meeting with the actors to talk about topics that moved us. That helped a lot to build trust, to feel free on set. And in most cases it only took a few takes.

### **How did you find the children and how did you work with them? Also, how exactly did you explain to them what the film was about?**

The task was to put together a 7th grade class. That is, we were looking for children between the ages of eleven and fourteen. This age group is characterized by the fact that there are children who are already very advanced, but there are also children who are very dreamy. It was important for me to see a lot of children in order to get an impression of this age group. Together with my children's casting director Patrick Dreikauss, we invited groups of four and five to play a casting scene. I gave the teacher, in front of whom they had to argue why they wanted to take part in a Fridays for Future





demo, for example.

After the given text, they were supposed to improvise. This separated the wheat from the chaff and you could see right away which of the kids was on their toes. These were two very intensive casting weeks, during which the search for Oscar ran in parallel. When the group of about 23 children was completed, I had individual conversations with all of them. It was all about the team spirit, I told them, you are not children, you are colleagues here. I briefed them, but not on what overriding themes would be dealt with in DAS LEHRERZIMMER, but explained to them how to read a shooting schedule, what to look out for on the set. The idea of solidarity, the idea of family, was important to me. On set, there were the aforementioned morning conversations with me and also Leonie, which were followed by rehearsals and then the shoot.

**At a time of heated social discourse, you are entering a veritable minefield, making yourself vulnerable to attack. Are you expecting headwinds? Are you prepared for it?**

I'm not worried about that because I stand behind the story. I don't know who I'm pissing off with that either. I also don't think that the film is an explicit criticism of the education system. Or that it explicitly criticizes the young people from the school newspaper. Or the parents. Everyone in the story is struggling for sovereignty and wants to be right. Once you turn on the TV and watch any talk show, you're basically looking at the exact same thing in green.

**How did you come up with the idea of the Rubik's Cube?**

Johannes and I talked about mathematics, algorithms and proofs and asked ourselves how we could visualize this abstract conceptuality. The Rubik's Cube offered itself because it also has something childlike about it.

**In math class, children learn that a proof is the derivation of the correctness of a statement that is recognized as error-free. This is precisely where Carla Nowak fails in the story...**

After all, it remains a blur. Is Mrs. Kuhn the thief? Who knows? It could be that she is innocent. A residual risk remains. As long as that's the case, you can't be sure of anything. Carla Nowak recognizes this, too, and from this arises the great dilemma. The film has a highly effective last shot.

**How did you arrive at this final image? What is your interpretation?**

The final image was an idea of Johannes. I see it as a commentary, as a plea for resistance, that one must not let a system get one down. What Oskar is doing is admirable, in an environment that is like David against Goliath. I wanted to grant him this exit. I was strongly influenced by Herman Melville's story «Bartleby» in the screenwriting process for DAS LEHRERZIMMER. It's the story of a refusal that ends with the death of the title character and the phrase «Oh Bartleby, oh humanity.» It was intended more as a critique of consumerism at the time. The book didn't let me go for over 20 years. In the run-up to the shooting, I gave Leonie a copy. After reading it, she said to me that the story had really depressed her. I had to laugh. To be honest, when I was working on DAS LEHRERZIMMER, I also didn't know exactly what message the film would have in the end. But it's also not about making a statement, it's about asking a question. That's the way I like to make cinema. The process of making a self-written film is always a journey into the unknown. If you know where the journey is going, it gets boring. With some films, you're more likely to know what feeling will be left behind. With DAS LEHRERZIMMER, I didn't know. It was a process of finding.

**How would you describe your relationship with cinematographer Judith Kaufmann?**

I could not have made this film without Judith. Judith has become such an important partner in terms of content. She enriches my view of the world, we talk about many topics, about our profession, about pressure, about gender roles. Judith always comes up with great ideas and images. Judith is such an experienced cinematographer, I consider myself lucky to have her by my side. The greatest luck you can have as a young filmmaker is to know such a great, competent person by your side. We have long since become good friends.

**Is cinema in 2023 the right place for social debates?**

Of course, cinema is a place we can use for social debates. But not compulsively. For me, cinema is also escapism and voyeurism. Cinema is campfire. I don't want to put cinema under an agenda. But of course I'm happy when there are films in the cinema that spark debate. Above all, there is hope for cinema again after the Corona pandemic. I went to see TRIANGLE OF SADNESS - the cinema was packed. The collective experience of laughing together, crying together - that's something very special. No streamer in the world will be able to produce that.



**You stand out with a very engaging, empathetic and human cinema. Do you find it easy to tell the stories that are close to your heart?**

Shooting is easy, staging is easy. But developing is comparable to birth pains. The script process requires so much discipline, consists of so much questioning oneself and one's ideas, writing out, rewriting, throwing away. Until it's good. If I said it was easy for me, I'd be lying. But it doesn't have to be easy either. Writing is part of cinema, just like staging, editing, evaluating. All that is cinema. That's why writing is part of the whole spectacle for me, the confrontation with material: What do I want to make, what do I want to tell, where do I want to go, what do I want with these films? None of these are easy questions, questions that often drive me to one desperation or another. But I can only do this job if I negotiate something that drives me, that has to do with me and my reality and our reality as a society.

Every script and every film has to have something worth getting up early for. And this getting up is not always easy in the book phase. Because you have to convince so many people with the script, commissioning editors, juries, actors. You get naked with every script, give it to people and hope that they like it. These are processes that are fraught with fear. You don't learn dramaturgy overnight. It often takes years to free yourself from your socialization, to be able to think anew, to not write what you've seen a thousand times before. I just hope that as I get older, this will come easier to me. The geniuses among us, I envy them. For me, it's hard work.



## Cast

Leonie Benesch	Carla Nowak
Leonard Stettinisch	Oskar Kuhn
Eva Löbau	Friederike Kuhn
Michael Klammer	Thomas Liebenwerda
Anne-Kathrin Gummich	Dr. Bettina Böhm
Kathrin Wehlisch	Lore Semnik
Sarah Bauerett	Vanessa König
Rafael Stachowiak	Milosz Dudek
Uygar Tamer	Ms. Yilmaz
Özgür Karadeniz	Mr. Yilmaz
Katinka Auberger	Maren Firouza

## Crew

Directed by	Ilker Çatak
Written by	Ilker Çatak, Johannes Duncker
Director of Photography	Judith Kaufmann
Production Design	Zazie Knepper
Costume Designer	Christian Röhrs
Original Sound	Torsten Többen
Editing	Gesa Jäger
Composer	Marvin Miller
Produced by	Ingo Flies (If...Productions film GmbH)
Line Producer	Markus Mayr
German Distributor	Alamode Filmdistribution
International Sales	Be For Films

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