

Educating the Educator

“The day will inevitably come,
when the words of the teacher will no longer be effective,
only that, what he is.¹

C. G. Jung

For a long time the main focus on education was the passing on of knowledge. The question of the principles and values conveyed through education became a focal point after the catastrophic, destructive methods of the National socialists. Educators should be an example to the learners, an aid to help them to orientate themselves. According to Naranjo: “Imitation is a biological desire that makes us human (...)”². As adults, we also follow those whom we admire. If we connect this to education, we see that schools need teachers who work with fundamental pedagogical questions above and beyond their specialist subjects. Self-perception and the ability to reflect have now found their way into the concepts of conventional teacher training courses³. C. G. Jung also emphasises the exemplary function of teachers and stresses the ever more important inner attitude of the teacher (see above).

“A teacher is he who supports the other in discovering the deeper meaning of his own life and experiences, and hence his own participation in the whole. (...) Thus teaching means nothing other than making this process of learning, of “bringing to the light” what is already there, experiential and conscious.”⁴

In my opinion, Heinrich Dauber describes here the true essence of the learning process. The conventional methods of imparting knowledge are mostly derived from the model concepts of behaviourism⁵ and strongly dominated the curriculum and the teacher training courses up to the 1970's. Towards the end of the 1960's the question of school reform, along with personal

¹ Dhority, L. Freeman / Hartkemeyer. Johannes F. und Martina (1998): Miteinander Denken – Das Geheimnis des Dialogs. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta. p. 157

² Naranjo, Claudio (2004): Cambiar la educación para cambiar el mundo. Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spanien: Editorial la llave, p. 68

³ Bildungskommission NRW (1995): Zukunft der Bildung – Schule der Zukunft. Neuwied; Kriftel; Berlin: Luchterhand, p.305

⁴ Dauber, Heinrich (1997a): Grundlagen der Humanistischen Pädagogik – Integrative Ansätze zwischen Therapie und Pädagogik. Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt, p.59

⁵ In the beginning of the 20th century Edward Thorndike did the advance work for behaviourism, which was founded by the American psychologist John B. Watson. In the 1950's he was strongly influenced by Burrhus Frederic Skinner. Behaviourism is a science of behaviour, or analysis of behaviour, according to which the behaviour of humans and animals should be investigated using the methods of natural science and is explainable through outer observation.

development and morals, became a more popular theme. In connection to this, the question concerning the natural abilities of children and the role of education became of more interest.

The family therapist Jesper Juul, founder and leader of the Kempler⁶ Institute of Scandinavia in Denmark, assumes for example that a child is socially and emotionally as competent as an adult from birth onwards. This competence doesn't have to be taught to children through education.⁷ He describes the equal role distribution in the mother-father-child relationship as an important element, whereby the social relationships within the family remain in the foreground. For Naranjo the father-mother-child relationship is rather a psychological concept, as it describes the fundamental inner part-personalities of the human.

Juul states that in traditional education the verbal strategies are often opposed to the educational contents. Children however mostly learn through imitation, as Naranjo describes (see above). Therefore Juul emphasises how important it is for children to be able to experiment and observe, and to fit into the culture through imitation. According to Juul, frequent explanations and warnings have a counter effect; the child feels stupid and helpless. Whether or not one uses an understanding, friendly tone, the message is the same. This form of education has a negative and damaging influence on the child's self-esteem and self-image. The child is basically unprotected against this development. Nowadays, according to Juul, this form of violence against children is expressed in promises and bribes.⁸ The "obstinate age", according to Juul, is a natural process and vitally important for the development of the child's independence. Fundamentally it is sensible for adults and also for children to set themselves boundaries, but to set boundaries for others Juul calls a form of exerting power.⁹ He explains:

"Part of these new paradigms is that the behaviour of the children is just as important, whether harmonious or disharmonious, for the human development and health of the parents as is the behaviour of the parents for the children. The interaction between parents and children is a mutual learning process, whereby the level of dignity on both sides is directly proportional to the gain for both partners."

Juul points out that it is important to learn to see the competence of the child and not always try to explain to the child or to interpret the child's behaviour. Unfortunately, according to Juul, often parents and experts just concentrate on the inappropriate behaviour of the child.

Naranjo describes the importance of teacher training at university level, and underlines that after completing studies at university the teacher should have attained the maturity which

⁶ Walter Kempler was one of Fritz Perls' colleagues (cf. p. 8), the founder of Gestalt therapy, and brought this approach to Europe in the 70's and continued to develop it.

⁷ Juul, Jesper (1997a): *Das kompetente Kind*. Rowohlt: Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1. ed., p. 11

⁸ Cf. Juul, Jesper (1997): *Vom Gehorsam zur Verantwortung. Für eine neue Erziehungskultur*. Walter: Düsseldorf, Zürich

⁹ Cf. Juul (1997a) p. 23-24, 26

is fundamental for a holistic education.¹⁰ “As life only exists through life, so the development of maturity can best be assisted by maturity”.¹¹ In today’s teacher training institutions, Naranjo stresses, therapeutic and spiritual aspects, and in particular consciousness exercises, are frequently excluded, and the student teachers often receive “an overload of intellectual baggage”.¹²

However, can one and should one really teach the knowledge in a world of information to a pupil in 13 years? Or is it perhaps in reality more meaningful to help the pupil to develop an attitude that makes it possible to attain fundamental characteristics such as respect for cultural differences, a positive self-image and social competence, in order to make possible peaceful human relationships and a respectful attitude to nature?

The Brazilian educator Paulo *Freire*¹³ (1921-1997) criticised the education system for being unsustainable, for he observed knowledge imparted in accordance with the “banker’s model”¹⁴ by “depositing” and accumulation. Instead of supporting the development of personality, the focus in classes concentrated too much on the testing and accumulation of information. If the only function of a teacher is to impart information, the children learn the contents in a mechanical way (if at all) and they become “containers”. This tragic development can never promote an attitude open for dialogue. A big mistake that Freire describes is that teachers often consider the ignorance of the pupils as given, in order to justify to themselves their own actions. This would imply the self-image of a “knower” and blocks the possibility to develop an open learning or dialogue attitude. Paulo Freire’s central critique is directed against the conventional relationship between pupil and teacher, he argues for a resolution of the teacher/pupil contradiction, because only through reconciliation of these poles can both partners be at the same time teachers and pupils.

Horst Siebert, professor for adult education in Hanover, writes about the attitude of educators:

¹⁰ Cf. Naranjo (2000), p. 100-102

¹¹ Dito. p. 105

¹² Dito p. 101

¹³ Cf. Freire, Paulo (1972): *Pädagogik der Unterdrückten*. Stuttgart/Berlin: Kreuz Verlag (Pedagogy of the oppressed)

¹⁴ Freire’s banker’s method describes the conventional form of imparting information. In this way the learner receives educational contents which, according to Freire, are important for the support of an economy and state system. The information or the contents to be learned are “transmitted” to the learners or “deposited” with them, and can later be recalled by the system. The contents of the education system often remain strange to the learner, because frequently the latter have other values and standards, other languages or simply come from an underprivileged class.

"We pedagogues must constantly be aware that our knowledge is not the truth, but likewise a construction of reality. We can talk about our mental construction, but we cannot simply transfer our conception of the world to others."¹⁵

Siebert works closely with constructivism. He explains that educators can only give offers of interpretation; whether the information is actually significant depends on personal experience and must therefore be decided individually.¹⁶ Similarly Rolf Arnold argues for learners to organize themselves. "In other words the teacher does not 'produce' the knowledge, which 'should be transferred to the pupils'; he 'enables' processes of independent knowledge searching and appropriation.¹⁷ According to Arnold the "foreign organization" (educators), should pay more attention to the conditions than to the subject matter.

Siebert explains: "Adults are able to learn, but unteachable."¹⁸ This awareness already has a certain acceptance in adult education, but I think that this idea should also form the basic attitude of pedagogues towards children and young people, in order to support and not instruct the learner. In my own experience, while working with young people and children, I became aware of how important it is to awaken the joy of learning for both sides in order to create a harmonious learning atmosphere. When I taught English in the first and second classes of a confessional boarding school for boys in Mexico, I noticed that they were studying under great pressure, and usually no consideration was taken of learning difficulties. When the head mistress explained to me that I should do an exam with the first class, the very idea was incomprehensible to me. Some of them could neither read nor write and we had just begun to approach the language with songs, poems and educational games, so why should I now evaluate them with marks? I prepared a test with drawings, colours and pictures so that they could all pass, but this experience made me start to question the basic approach of the conventional educational system. Since I lived in the boarding school and also cared for the children in the afternoon and evening, from the beginning we had a different pupil-teacher relationship from most teachers. For many pupils the teacher figure was usually connected with rather negative associations.

I think that it is very important to understand that children and also young people want to learn and that the wish is inherent to experience more, to collect information, to understand processes and educate oneself, just as this wish also exists in each human being, in the sense

¹⁵ Siebert, Horst (1994): Lernen als Konstruktion von Lebenswelten – Entwurf einer konstruktivistischen Didaktik. Frankfurt/Main: VAS, p. 82

¹⁶ Cf. dito. p.45-46

¹⁷ Arnold, Rolf (1993): Natur als Vorbild – Selbstorganisation als Modell der Pädagogik. Frankfurt/Main: VAS, p. 53

¹⁸ Siebert, Horst (1996): Didaktisches Handeln in der Erwachsenenbildung. Grundlagen der Weiterbildung - Didaktik aus konstruktiver Sicht. Neuwied: Luchterhand, p. 293

of the approaches of Naranjo and Juul. Therefore it is important to use this potential and to develop it further in a learner-friendly environment, in open dialogue and with an attitude of self-reflexion.

Conclusion

A fundamental critique of the current education system has been expressed frequently in this essay. The focus of this criticism is directed above all at the transfer of knowledge which lies at the core of the system, leaving the real question about the meaning of education and educational values open. Education and in particular the institutionalised educational system have an enormous influence on the development of our society.

Naranjo sees the strongly one-sided patriarchal system as the main problem and pleads for stronger internal, psycho-spiritual development. In his opinion this aspect should be much more strongly included into the educational system.

In my opinion the inability to love, which Naranjo describes as a social illness, is an important aspect in regard to the educational system. It is only if the teacher loves his pupils, on the level of charity (agape), accepting them the way they are, developing an understanding of their actions, that it is possible to meet the pupils in a fruitful way. Since I personally experienced a state school and later a Rudolf Steiner (Waldorf) School, I experienced the differences and would like to refer to them here, because these impressions affect my personal approach to the theme.

In the Rudolf Steiner School the class teacher usually visits his pupils at least once at home in their family. I consider that very important, in order to be able to get an idea of the home environment of the pupil. In Waldorf education one of the tasks of a Waldorf teacher is to consciously integrate his pupils in his own thoughts and bring them before his inner, spiritual eye. This leads to involvement with the pupils on a different level from that of transferring knowledge. Waldorf education is often criticised because of its theoretical structure, based on anthroposophy. However, in my judgement an educational system that has no background ideology is often only an empty shell. If humans are only seen as stimulus-response objects or as a composition of different atomic particles and the consciousness as an illusion (cf. Wilber, p. 28), then a mental and spiritual development, as Naranjo among others describes, would be completely redundant.

While I worked on the four fundamental pillars of Naranjo's idea of education: body, feelings, intellect and spirit, (cf. chapter 3.1. p. 36-40), it became clear to me that many of these aspects are also present in Waldorf education: for example; the artistic and practical lessons, a class community from classes one to thirteen and guided common projects, eurhythmy classes, theatre performances, making music from Class One on, story-telling, exploring nature, gardening, etc.. Naranjo describes all these areas in his description of an educational system.

There are certainly other reform schools which work with, or apply, similar ideas; however, in this essay I would like to draw on those of my personal experiences which appear to be important in this connection. In order to explain my point of view more clearly, I wish to insert here that during my own search (as Naranjo mentions: la busqueda=the search), I found my way to Waldorf education and I have now started a Waldorf teacher training. Thus my work in Mexico was a decisive impulse for me, because the educational system there, up to and including the university, is very conventional and old-fashioned.

Naranjo conducts a predominantly psychological interpretation of education and stresses the inner, individual elements of psycho-spiritual development or training without treating at any length the social aspects. For me this points to the assumption that a renewal of education can only be attained by humans who themselves undergo, as Naranjo suggests, an individual process of transformation and becoming conscious. Perhaps from this new impulses will arise for social change, as Waldorf education also originally developed out of a spiritual impulse and in the last decades has developed into a world-wide movement.