

THE PEDAGOGICAL PARADOX AND THE PROBLEM OF SUBJECTIVITY AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY

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Introduction - general theory of education?

The present paper investigates in what sense the Fichtean concept of "provocation to self-reflection" (*Aufforderung*) and Herbart's concept of 'Bildsamkeit' may be used in order to handle the problematic relation between subjectivity and intersubjectivity. The general framework of the analysis is the tradition of *general theory of education* (or general pedagogics). By this I refer to the tradition of 'Allgemeine Pedagogik' and/or 'Systematische' Pedagogik. In the Nordic countries, like in Germany, general (theory as of) pedagogics (i.e. Allgemeine Pedagogik) has traditionally covered what in the Anglo-American world is referred to by theory and philosophy of education. More specifically general pedagogics has focused on an ontological level of analysis aiming at foundational theory characterising cultural human growth in relation to pedagogical efforts (Herbart, Schleiermacher). The analysis of the central concepts in German general education, i.e. "Erziehung" and "Bildung", reflects this intention. The German tradition still owes very much to J. F. Herbart's way of approaching the problem first explicated 1806 in his *Allgemeine Pedagogik*. Herbart builds upon Rousseau, Fichte and others but his way of structuring the field in many respects did set the agenda for 200 years.

Some main questions that are analysed within general pedagogic are the following:

1. What is education and human growth (Erziehung and Bildung)?
2. What makes education possible?
3. What makes education necessary?
4. What are the limits of education?
5. Is a universal theory of education possible?
6. How is education related to other disciplines?
7. Can and should a general theory education be normative or not with respect to aims and methods?

The above list is not to be understood as an exhaustive list of questions but it should fairly well reflect the orientation within general education, which, in the light of the questions presented, is a philosophical discipline.

The Pedagogical Paradox the Problem of Being and Becoming

An example of the kind of issues general pedagogics is expected to deal with as a theory oriented towards foundational questions is the so-called pedagogical paradox. That pedagogic deals with paradoxes is not new - we are all familiar with Menon's paradox on learning. Plato asks us how we should explain learning given that we cannot search for knowledge if we don't know what to look for.

But, on the other hand, if we had knowledge it would obviously no longer be necessary to look

for it. In this paradox the condition for reaching knowledge is to have knowledge: we have to know in order to look for knowledge.

We also know that Plato's answer was the nativist one. The learner had to learn only one thing and that was to remember that she already does possess the knowledge required. Knowledge was thought to be connected to her soul. When the learner has learned to remember then she can start striving at reaching "in-sight". In other words, in this paradox the learner has to reach something she already has.

The pedagogical paradox reminds us of the learning paradox. Education is often viewed as provocation to self-reflection, as a process where the individual is required to reach something through her own activity. The individual is provoked to transcend, by her own efforts, her previous capacity.

The teacher thus tries to make herself superfluous and the pedagogical suicide is therefore the teacher's leading principle in this tradition. However, in order for the individual to transcend her present state, to reach something beyond it (e.g. *Mündigkeit*) she must, according to this line of reasoning, already be conceived of as being an autonomous and self-reflecting individual.

The educating act (*Aufforderung*) presupposes autonomy and self-reflection, in other words, presupposes the very existence of that which coming to existence it is trying to facilitate. Explicated differently the pedagogical paradox is related to the subjectivity of the individual: In order for education to be possible there must be a somebody who's reflection is provoked, but simultaneously it is thought that the individual becomes a somebody, i.e. develops a personality, through education.

Again we face the problem of assuming the existence of something of which education was to be the precondition. The essence of this paradox is to stimulate the learner to something she is not yet able, and to simultaneously consider the learner as being able to what she is stimulated. In other words, that the learner is viewed to be something she is not but what the learner can become through her own activity (Benner, 1991, p. 71).

Still differently stated, the pedagogic paradox concerns the following dilemma: In order for education to be possible the individual must be free, and simultaneously, in order for the individual to become free education is necessary. Again we face the problem of how the individual can become something that she already is, namely free. And how can education be conceived of as necessary if individual growth is viewed as resulting from the individual's own activity?

The learning paradox in Meno and the pedagogical paradox as explicated above also have a theological background. It is not unusual to point at that the concept of *Bildung* partly includes the idea of *imago dei*: as man is a picture of God the aim of education is to support the individual's development towards this inherent picture (Flitner 1957, p. 116). The idea is here that even though man is a picture of God she can become a picture of God through her own actions. The paradox of Christianity is that man has the possibility to become what she already is, an image of God and by her own activity participate in the project of *Imitatio Christi*, man's reunion

with God (Lenzen, 1996, p. 172ff). We can thus identify a similarity between the theological and the pedagogical paradox.

In this respect enlightenment pedagogy may be seen as a secularised theology. If there is a paradise and a hell on earth the role of the school is to prepare for the earthly life, like the role of the church is to prepare of the eternal paradise and its opposite. The role of educational theory is thus analogous to theology. Normative education can structurally be compared with confessional theology.

The question is whether enlightenment theory of education is a myth by which we live? The question is maybe not so much about if we should or should not destroy this myth. But to understand educational theory in this light helps us to understand that we live by such a myth. Maybe this change in understanding ourselves represents a change in our cultural self-understanding? What consequences will it have if we see that also the enlightenment view of education belongs to the grand narratives through which we structure our culture?

Returning to the paradox. In this traditional pedagogical paradox there is also a problem of normativity in it, which is useful to point out. The paradox consisted in how it is reasonable to assume that in order for education to be possible the individual must be free, and simultaneously, in order for the individual to become free education is necessary. How can the individual become something that she already is? The solution in this case may be that two different concepts of freedom are involved here and they are related to education in a very specific way. The first form of freedom is the human ability to learn or change through experience. This is what makes education possible.

The second form of freedom in the paradox above is cultural ability, i.e. without education (in a very general sense of the word) the individual does not reach cultural autonomy. This aspect of freedom makes education necessary. In other words, education is legitimated with the child's immaturity, the child being non-autonomous. If the child is seen as totally autonomous then she is in no need of education and could not be educated (to be compared with radical constructivism).

When considering the pedagogical paradox it is interesting to observe on what grounds it is assumed that the individual should be educated towards autonomy (*Mündigkeit*). It is not difficult to see that all positions accepting the concept of *Mündigkeit* in the end are normative theories. But why should an individual be educated towards increasing self-reflection, towards individual responsibility, towards cultural independence at all? Especially if it is thought that the individual already is culturally free, is able to reflect upon her etc? There is nothing that logically leads us to conclude that *Mündigkeit* must be the aim only because the learner is viewed as free (Lenzen, 1996, p. 184). To say that the individual has the possibility to develop something is one thing; another thing is to say that this and that are what she should develop. From is we cannot reach ought.

But is the concept of *Mündigkeit* a pedagogical concept? I would say no. It does not help us to understand the pedagogical process in any more detail; it only describes what education can be aiming at. Still it is of high relevance if we use it to legitimate education as an empirical phenomenon.

Bildsamkeit

One way of approaching the pedagogical paradox is to acknowledge the concept of *Bildsamkeit*. For example, Klaus Mollenhauer (1983) and Dietrich Benner (1991) have explicated their positions by making use of the concepts of *Bildsamkeit* and *Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit*. *Bildsamkeit*, a concept introduced by Herbart in his early writings, does not refer to the individual's plasticity or to the possibility to form or mould the individual. More specifically *Bildsamkeit* refer to the individuals own conscious efforts aiming at reaching knowledge (insight). The educator does not give this ability. *Aufforderung* is then to provoke the individual to become engaged in a self-transcending process. These principles, introduced by Fichte and Herbart, are thought of as being dialectically related to each other. The tension between these principles may also be used to analytically handle the pedagogic paradox.

Intersubjectivity and subjectivity

Another and complementary contemporary way of dealing with the pedagogical paradox has been to discuss subjectivity starting from egological or idealistic conceptions of subjectivity and from the concept of intersubjectivity. The question is then how we should relate subjectivity to intersubjectivity and second how to relate this discussion to the pedagogical concepts of *Bildsamkeit* and *Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit* (or *Bildung* and *Erziehung*) (Uljens 1998, p. 164-185).

In idealist philosophy there is a long tradition emphasising the primacy of the subject in a dualistic subject-object relation. In this tradition the individual by herself constitutes herself and the world, without relation to alterity. Kant and Husserl both represent this tradition. And even though Husserl starts from the life-world he ends up through the concept of reduction in a position where the other is reduced to experience of the Me. According to the subject-centred view intersubjectivity is a common world resulting from interaction, something growing out from the pedagogical process. And having reached maturity (*Mündigkeit*) the pedagogical paradox is solved. Kant also wants to support the individual's 'Mündigkeit': "*Unmündigkeit ist das Unvermögen, sich seines Verstandes ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen*" (Kant 1996, p. 9).

Pedagogical problems

From a pedagogical perspective this egological or transcendental position is problematic because if the subject due to the transcendental Ego is free in a radical meaning to constitute itself, then the process of *Bildung* is possible, the individual can educate herself, *but Erziehung* is not possible in this Kantian theory of transcendental idealism. How could one somebody else possibly be in touch with such a transcendental subjectivity? But we know that this Kantian view of subjectivity was criticised. And it was criticised by Herbart who obviously saw that this transcendental theory could not form any fundament for a pedagogical theory and who offered the concept of *Bildsamkeit* as a way out of this dilemma (e.g. Siljander 2000).

Generally taken the concept of *Bildsamkeit* should deserve more attention in the contemporary

discussion. Sometimes it has been compared with learning ability (Anlage, Vermögen) but this would make it something else other than a relational concept opening up a part of the pedagogical process. Thus it is a concept related to historical and social reality. But even though *Bildsamkeit* describes the pedagogical process from the learner's perspective so to say, it does not assume that some kind of self-regulating activity could, by itself, realise the process of *Bildung*. As an empirical concept it not only opens up, but also presupposes, a world that is interwoven with it. Therefore *Bildsamkeit* also makes *Bildung* as an intentional activity possible. The Fichtean concept of *Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit* may then be used to describe this pedagogical activity. But this provocation must not necessarily be interpreted as an example of instrumentalist activity, on the contrary.

However, to me it seems that the concept of *Bildsamkeit* is also used in a regulative sense in relation to *Aufforderung*. According to this, the pedagogical provocation should not be carried out so that the individuals own conscious activity is violated or disregarded. In this sense the pedagogical relation is also asymmetrical. But, instead of that *Bildung* or *Aufforderung* tries to get the learner "to dream the same dream" as the teacher, it can point at questions to which our present knowledge is an answer to. *Bildung* can therefore not lead us to the answer on the meaning of life, but it can help us to formulate the question in relation to the life-world and the tradition. But of course, the questions we choose to deal with are also a value-bound activity. This we cannot escape. But the concepts of *Bildsamkeit* and *Aufforderung* do not tell us what questions we should choose only how they should be dealt with. In this sense we can see a difference to explicitly normative theories.

The critique against transcendental idealism has supported the growth of interest towards the concept of intersubjectivity (e.g. Kivelä 2000). Theoretical positions according to which intersubjectivity may be seen as the precondition of subjectivity are popular today. Arendt, Buber, Habermas, Mead and Merleau-Ponty are viewed as representatives of what could be called radical intersubjectivity giving priority to the intersubjective relation over subjectivity. According to this theory subjectivity is not reduced to the experience of the other. It is strongly emphasised that the subjects are relationally constituted.

This "radical" version of intersubjectivity indeed seems attractive especially when we focus on the relation between uncultured subjects, the engagement between already linguistic subjects. The dialogue as a communicative system is then conceived of as something else and something more than the sum of the subjects involved. The intention of the individual's acts and the meaning of these acts are thus separated - the meaning depends on somebody else's interpretation and through this the acting individual better understands her intention (Masschelein, 1996). The dialogue lives its own life, so to speak, and the views expressed blend into something common which is not possible to reduce to the subjectivity of the involved. In and through this common conversation the subject gets an opportunity to transcend her present state of understanding - the empirical subject transcends herself in relation to the common sphere that is established. The subject does not lose her individuality or inner world and the other does not gain access to this inner world, if it is not brought to expression. The idea seems to include that in principle the inner world is always possible to express. "Nothing is hidden" to borrow Norman Malcolm's expression.

It appears as if these radical approaches to intersubjectivity replace the transcendental Ego in idealist philosophy with the Ego of the Other. Does then, radical intersubjectivity require an individual who is aware of herself as being a somebody who then is engaged with somebody else, with Otherness? Is it possible to claim that what is first is the intersubjective relation and only given the existence of this relation subjectivity can be constituted? Or is some kind of rudimentary subjectivity still required?

We saw previously that the problem in transcendental idealism is that *Aufforderung* is neither possible nor necessary, as the individual constitutes herself in this view. Within a radical intersubjective framework it appears as if pedagogical activity is something unnecessary. According to this view we already share a common world of some kind. But are we forced to choose between either a transcendental view of subjectivity or a radical view of intersubjectivity? Or can we choose both subjectivity and intersubjectivity as primary categories?

Conclusions

From the very beginning human beings, born into a world not chosen by them, are oriented towards the world - the spontaneity of the newborn is something given. This orientation is not a result of pedagogical efforts. And this spontaneity must not necessarily be viewed as resulting from any transcendental subject but is something empirical. This rudimentary spontaneity of the child may be experienced by the parents as a provocation. The first question for the parents is if the child should be taken care of or not. Simultaneously, the parents caring of the newborn may be understood as a kind of provocation from the child's perspective. There is not yet any common language that can be used, but there is physical contact. The child experiences the world through her body, so to speak. There is eye contact; the child and the adult confirm the existence of each other. Although the parent is not sure about if there is a "somebody" she acts as if there is a somebody, not only a "something". This communication based on the spontaneity of the child and the cultural patterns of activity from the parent's side results stepwise in what could be called cultural intersubjectivity. Having reached some degree of culturally shared world the provocation to self-reflection changes. This provocation has no causal effects; the individual experiences them and may respond to them. To a growing extent the child can decide upon how to react on these provocations. Individual transcendence is not either independent of how she is met. Her learning of a language is a result of this process; her cultural self-understanding or identity is related to education.

Given that the first nine months of our lives we live in the most extreme, close physical contact that we may think of, it is not odd to think that we must accept a kind of pre-reflective, bodily constituted intersubjectivity as something very fundamental. This is broken by birth but the bodily relation continues. We would thus be able to identify at least two types of intersubjectivity: a pre-reflective physical and a cultural one.

It is also useful to remember that the newborn child instantly recognises her mother's voice better than voices of others. This shows that even the newborn child is already an experienced subject, a cultural being, she is not a *tabula rasa*, something completely new. Given that the newborn both is cultural subject and given that the child also has this natural orientation towards the world it appears as if it is reasonable to make a distinction also between two forms of subjectivity, of which neither is transcendental.

There is a kind of primary subjectivity of the individual (i.e. spontaneity) that is not given by any pedagogical process. There also is a kind of primary intersubjective relation that is not given by pedagogical activity. On the other hand, in order to reach a cultural level of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, pedagogical efforts seem to be most crucial. The concepts of *Bildsamkeit* and *Aufforderung zur Selbst Mündigkeit* have a role to play here.

Against this background it appears to me that a reasonable point of departure is to accept both a subject-centered and an intersubjective dimension as simultaneous points of departure. Maybe we should leave an "either-or" type of thinking and reductionist approaches connected to this? Maybe we should replace it with an "both-and" type of reasoning and adopt a complementary way of understanding intersubjectivity and subjectivity?

To me it seems that these are pedagogically fundamental questions. If they are accepted as such then there still is a mission for general (systematic) pedagogy or *Allgemeine Pedagogik*. It is also worth noting that the view developed above makes sense only in a historical perspective. Further, this view is an example of self-ironical foundationalism: I outline this view as if I believe that it is true, but I do not claim having described any reality. Some may say this is psychology, others that this is an example of trying to find an anthropological answer to what man is rather than to describe somebody he comes a someone.

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