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Educational Theorists

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In 1989, Helmut Peukert organized in Hamburg an intensive seminar on the work of Wilhelm Flitner at the occasion of his hundredth birthday. Flitner who was to die 1 year later had been teaching for almost 30 years in Hamburg and was one of the leading figures of the so-called Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik. This was a crucial tendency in educational thought which has been very influential far beyond German borders throughout a large part of the twentieth century. And although there are, no doubt, very dubious and questionable aspects related to the entanglement of at least some of its representatives in the NS policies and ideologies, there is also no doubt that the "Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik" has played a very important role in the exploration of the possibility of the elaboration of autonomous educational thought.

It is no surprise then that the central question of the seminar in Hamburg concerned the place of a "general educational theory" ("Allgemeine Erziehungswissenschaft"). And that the central reference was to Flitner's phrase that such a theory relies on a "basic pedagogical thought" ("einen Pädagogischen Grundgedankgang") which brings different central and *internal* pedagogical concepts into relation such as "Bildung," "Bildsamkeit," "Bildungsweg,"and "Bildungsziel" (see Peukert 1992). In fact, the seminar closed a decade in which German philosophy and theory of education ("Allgemeine Pädagogik" or "Allgemeine Erziehungswissenschaft"), after the emergence and tremendous flourishing of critical and emancipatory pedagogy in the 1960s and 1970s, felt itself increasingly colonized by sociology and critical social theory (reducing education in one way or another to ideology or socialization and disciplinary power). It was also a decade also in which it was confronted with what it considered to be a worn-out idea of individual emancipation and a pointless critique of education (as "oppressing" theory and practice) that seemed to imply even the end of educational theory and of education as such, as proclaimed by the anti-pedagogy declarations ("Anti-pädagogik"). In 1983, Klaus Mollenhauer's "Vergessene Zusammenhänge" (in 2014 translated in English as "Forgotten Connections") had been one of the first attempts to explicitly deal with these issues. He explicitly stated that the so-called Anti-Pädagogik offered one of the reasons for writing the book. Another crucial reason is the apparent "pathlessness" or aporia in which, according to Mollenhauer, educational theory had landed, leading him, one of the most important German educational theorists, to state 5 years later that thinking about "Bildung und Erziehung" has become so difficult that we might

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even say that the pedagogical era has come to a provisional end (Mollenhauer 1986, p. 7).

Nevertheless, Mollenhauer remained strongly concerned for the development of an autonomous educational or pedagogical thought and maintained that we should continue to address the "basic set of pedagogical issues" that nobody can ignore who is dealing with education. It was one of the reasons that he was also present at the aforementioned seminar in Hamburg in 1989. And it is clear that Mollenhauer was establishing himself consciously a (today maybe somewhat "forgotten") connection to a tradition of educational thought that started with Schleiermacher that was clearly present in the "Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik" and wanted to identify some basic and particular "features," which would characterize the educational phenomenon and the pedagogical relationship. This should offer the starting point for the elaboration of a proper educational thought or general study (called "Allgemeine Pädagogik" or simply "Pädagogik"). It is also in line with this tradition that Johann Friedrich Herbart claimed and elaborated "einheimische Begriffe" ("internal concepts"); that Wilhelm Flitner suggested and requested, as we mentioned before, a "pädagogischer Grundgedankengang" ("basic pedagogical thought"); and that Martinus Jan Langeveld stated that educational thought ("theoretische pedagogiek") is no philosophy but "pedagogics" ("Pedagogiek") and proposed the "animal educandum" as the constitutive pedagogical-anthropological "fact." But, undoubtedly, also people in other places of the world such as Paulo Freire or John Dewey have been part in this endeavor to invent, create, or establish a particular mode of thinking (conceptualization, problematization, argumentation, criticism) that engages directly with the phenomenon of education and tries to explicate some of its characteristic features.

For us today, taking up or reenacting this intellectual endeavor to indicate a proper place for educational thought seems crucially relevant. Indeed, in a time where we are confronted not only with a sociological or ideological colonization but with the omnipresence of (bio-) psychological approaches (including the apparently unavoidable "learning discourse") toward the educational field and, moreover, with an ever-pervasive emptying of traditional frames of reference, the question of "elementary pedagogical issues" and of a proper educational thought deserves to be taken up and emphasized once again.

However, we would like to point also to the risk of a particular philosophical "colonization" of educational thought. Indeed, explicitly taking distance from psychological, biological, or even sociological approaches to education is to a large part central to the actual self-understanding and self-definition of philosophy of education. But one of the reasons for reemphasizing the importance of the tradition of educational thought "proper" is that philosophy of education and educational theory, having the tendency to rely on philosophical master thinkers such as Habermas, Wittgenstein, Levinas, Lyotard, Agamben, Rorty, Arendt, etc., run the risk to be trapped in a movement of instrumentalizing or even marginalizing education and learning. The risk is that education and learning are considered to be foremost a field of application for theories developed elsewhere and for other purposes or to be a field of practice with a function or meaning that is only to be derived from other noneducational practices.

While philosophy of education is often engaged in great efforts to disentangle the complexities of the work of the master thinkers, education and learning are often turned into a field of application, if education and learning as well as a genuine educational concern are not completely marginalized. One could oppose to this thesis and argue that almost all of these philosophies and theories acknowledge themselves that learning and education are important and some of them even explicitly invoke learning processes (Habermas 1981), learning curves (Latour 2004), learning (Sloterdijk 2014), childhood (Lyotard 1988; Agamben 2002), or teaching (Levinas 1998) as crucial phenomena to clarify their understanding of our world and our being. Our thesis is, however, that this focus on education and learning is often motivated by another than educational concern.

In this respect, we can distinguish between different kinds of philosophers, first, the *learning philosophers* (e.g., Habermas, Latour, Sloterdijk) for whom education and learning seem to be notions that indicate a process of change. However, they always in one way or another postulate these notions as needed to save or Mollenhauer 2014 close their ethical, political, or social intellectual project, that is, to explain how ethical, political, or social changes come about. As such, educational change and the educational meaning of change are either being ignored or ridiculed. And if it is conceptualized, in one way or another, education is narrowed to a form of socialization (habituation, acquisition) or – in progressive circles – an attempt to counter-socialization. Ultimately, the social and cultural theories of these (*social) learning philosophers* are theories about grown-ups and about how adults need learning but without becoming a child. Secondly, we could speak about "enfance/infantia" philosophers (e.g., Lyotard, Agamben). Without going into detail, and hence doing injustice to the complexities of the work of these authors, we do think their references to education and childhood often become *images* or *metaphors* to think about what is at stake in adult life. For them, education and learning are at least not the key concern. And if their thoughts are translated to (philosophy of) education itself, it is perhaps not a surprise that education runs the risk of being framed in therapeutic or ethical terms. The risk is a kind of personalization by putting in one way or another a dialogical or analytical relation between persons, that is, the person of the teacher and the person of the pupil, central stage. The pedagogical key issue is not turned into an issue of socialization or counter-socialization but becomes the act of "doing justice" to someone (or even to enfance/infancy as such). In a different way, for sure, we can relate, thirdly, also some *teaching philosophers* to this ethical framing of education. Although we also cannot render it in its complexity, we could point here for example to Levinas' use of the *teaching* metaphor to describe the way the ethical demand is inscribed before the subject comes to itself (Levinas 1998). It is a description which in the context of philosophy of education is often turned around so to say, to understand teaching as quasi-identical with an ethical relation. An ethical framing of education is very often related to an understanding of ethics in terms of being summoned before the "face of the other" as the "Law" beyond any law. Perhaps another version of this ethical teaching philosophy is the work of Judith Butler (2005) on the decisive role of an act of interpellation in the constitution of subjectivity. In line with this, there is the interpretation of the act of teaching as working according to the logic of interpellation and focusing on the relational and performative dimension of the child's subjectivity. Furthermore, such enfance/infancy philosophers and teaching philosophers, perhaps, should be distinguished from *game philosophers*. Again without claiming to make a final statement about the complexity of his work, we could think of Wittgenstein (1965), with his concept of language game being the most telling one. Probably here, the focus and concern are already much more on the practice of education, although the experience of education itself and the specificity of educational and learning events and relations are much less outspoken. Education along these lines is not a matter of socialization or capacity to act but a matter of initiation.

As we indicated before, while all these philosophies and theories acknowledge that childhood and change through education are important and while they are postulating the existence of conditions of childhood and childish conditions, education and childhood are at once "instrumentalized," be it as a temporary condition, a necessary evil, or a logical factor in view of ethical, political, or social change or be it as an image or practice to conceptualize what is difficult to conceptualize in adult life. The risk of/for philosophy of education and educational theory is to be trapped in the same movement of instrumentalizing or even marginalizing education and naturalizing learning. And a maybe unexpected example is offered by the meanwhile influential distinction by Biesta (2009) between qualification, socialization, and subjectification. For him, these are the three functions or roles of education, and often all three of them are playing a role. Clearly, Biesta wants to focus on the role of subjectification – becoming a person, by finding a place in the world – against

the often dominant roles of socialization and qualification. The critical question, however, is whether these are the three roles or functions to be distinguished when looking indeed at education from a pedagogical/educational perspective. Although we recognize for sure that Biesta contributes importantly to emphasizing the role of education in a time of learning, we think this is not the case and that the distinction is the result of combining the three different approaches which are all external to education. It seems as if the qualification function pops up when looking at education from an economic perspective, while socialization (and the process of integration in social norms and values) is the key term when looking through sociological lenses. Subjectification, then, is what appears when approaching education either politically (in line with a certain reading of Rancière: becoming someone which is at the same time challenging the existing social order in terms of equality) or ethically (in line with a certain interpretation of Levinas: becoming someone which is always motivated by a call from the other in terms of doing justice). We think that qualification, socialization, and subjectification represent three versions of taming education: an ethical-personalizing or political-equalizing taming of education that imposes ethical or political standards on change (subjectification), an economical one that imposes an exchange value or investment calculus (qualification), and a sociological one that tames educational change by imposing the rules of social and cultural reproduction – or in a progressive version – the rules of social renewal and change (socialization). In one way or another, part of this taming is that a specific "destiny" (natural, or social, cultural, political, etc.) is put forward as the horizon to think about education or about change through education. From a pedagogical/educational or "internal" perspective on education, we think it is important to link up with the basic idea that human beings have no natural or other destination, and education in one way or another is exactly about "finding" one's destiny.

In order to strengthen such an internal perspective, i.e., a pedagogical or educational approach and to do justice to the phenomenon of learning and education itself, we suggest that it would be helpful to deal with some major issues in educational philosophy and theory returning to some "early modern" and "modern" key figures in the field of education. It is the authors who have developed an *educational* approach or theory, contributed to an *educational* vocabulary, and expressed a deep *educational* concern in their intellectual but often also their practical work. Some of these figures are really broadly renowned (such as Comenius, Herbart, Dewey, Buber, Peters, Freire, Mollenhauer) and others less known (such as Rodrigues, Deligny, or even Ortega y Gasset and Langeveld), at least in the western Anglo-Saxon and German context. We deliberately mention "educational theorists or thinkers," or at least philosophers or educationalists who did some substantial work in educational theory or educational philosophy. To give voice again to these authors and their educational ideas would be the first ambition, but not the only one. Another aim would be to show that educational theory and philosophy is not just "applied" philosophy (or any other applied discipline), but could be regarded as a particular mode of thinking including specific forms of problematization and conceptualization. This means that we do not need some extended biography or an extensive bibliography of these key figures, but rather descriptions or indications on the "ethos" and "approach" of these educational theorists and thinkers. What we need is a specific attention on the mode of thinking (conceptualization, problematization, argumentation, hesitation, criticism) through which each of these key authors discusses or engages with the phenomenon of education and the related practices, theories, and discourses. Without exception, the work of these key figures is a way of finding a proper answer to what was at stake in their present, in view of their past and future, and in ongoing discussion with practices of education and other voices in educational theory and philosophy. We could thereby draw attention to the force, creativity, and originality of their ideas and carefully show or expose what is "educational" in their work and what is still "topical" (without pointing directly at relevance). This could help us to show how educational thinking

is not only an abstract (mental) activity but somehow always involves a particular relation to (or care for) oneself, others, and the (educational) world. As such, it could contribute to the development and elaboration of thinking and practice, a "language" of education, and learning itself.

One important issue that such an elaboration of a "language of education" entails considers the aspect of translation. Indeed, although it applies for many fields, especially this field of "educational thought" or philosophy of education deals with serious difficulties of translation, since they concern essential notions such as "pedagogy" and "education" itself. It is, for instance, problematic to translate the German "Pädagogik," the Dutch "pedagogiek," the Spanish "pedagogia," or the French "pédagogie" with the English "pedagogy." In other languages, pedagogy is not restricted to school education but refers to acting and relationships in other spaces of learning as well. And even when used in relation to school education, in other languages, it can refer to aspects of schooling that have to do with broader aims and practices associated with becoming an adult or becoming a person. An even bigger problem is related to the notion of education. The English term has a broad meaning but remains at the same time closely associated with formal education. However, it is important to keep in mind that it often has a specific meaning and that therefore there is in fact often a hesitation whether to use the notion of "educational" or "pedagogical." And let us, lastly, point to the (German) notion of "Bildung" which is now also increasingly appearing and discussed outside the German context (or the context strongly influenced by it). Although attempts at translation have been tried by philosophers and historians, the notion actually remains mostly untranslated and seems on the way to become part of the language of education more broadly and generally, apparently being able to articulate concerns that transcend the German context to which it was connected.

To conclude and summarize, we think that, in order to confront and think our educational present, educational or pedagogical thought should not only distance itself from sociology, psychology, or economy but also from ethics, politics, and – and this is the main point we wanted to make – also philosophy (at least philosophy limited to master thinkers). It is not because we consider these disciplines and approaches as unimportant or irrelevant, we do not at all, and we do acknowledge for sure the importance of philosophy but because it could help to elaborate a language, problematization, and conceptualization of education and learning that is itself educational, especially when being today under the spell of the "learning society."

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