

Sozialtheoretische Erziehungswissenschaft

Die Überlegung, dass Menschen als Subjekte nicht einfach gegeben sind, sondern sich selbst von Anderen her erlernen, kann mit Norbert Ricken als Kerngedanke einer sozialtheoretischen Erziehungswissenschaft verstanden werden. Diesen Gedanken zur Beobachtung eines sozialen Geschehens als eines pädagogischen zugrunde zu legen und im Rückgriff auf philosophische, sozial- und kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektiven zu schärfen, stellt das Hauptanliegen des Buches dar. Die Sozialität von Mensch und Erziehung bildet damit den Ausgangspunkt des hier konturierten Theorie- und Forschungsprogramms.

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Inhaltsverzeichnis

Sozialtheoretische Erziehungswissenschaft. Annäherung an das Theorie- und Forschungsprogramm	1
Ole Hilbrich, Nadine Rose und Nele Kuhlmann	

Teil I Arbeit an den Konturen des Theorie- und Forschungsprogramms

Praxistheoretische Forschung zwischen Pädagogisierung und Ent-Pädagogisierung. Chancen und Risiken einer sozialtheoretischen Umcodierung der Erziehungswissenschaft	35
Nicole Balzer und Johannes Bellmann	
Zur Frage des Regierens	67
Alfred Schäfer	
Sich von Anderen erlernen. Ein Schreibgespräch	89
Carolin Bebek und Benjamin Weber	
Darf's ein bisschen mehr sein? Dimensionen des Sozialen in einer ,sozialtheoretischen Erziehungswissenschaft'	109
Jürgen Wittpoth	

Teil II Formen und Praktiken einer sozialtheoretischen Erziehungswissenschaft

Sozialtheorie und Pädagogik im 19. Jahrhundert. Karl Mager, Carl Gottfried Scheibert und der Entwurf einer „Social-Pädagogik“ 125
Sabine Reh und Joachim Scholz

Bildsamkeit und Lenksamkeit. Über den Zusammenhang von *perfectibilité* und *docilité* in Rousseaus Pädagogik. 145
Andreas Gelhard

Bildsamkeit und Bildungstrieb. Selbstthematization vor dem Hintergrund epigenetischer Theorien um 1800 163
Egbert Witte

Arbeit, Seele, Anlage: Dreifacher Versuch über die Einzelnen und ihr Potential 185
Florian Heßdörfer

Bildung, Sprache und die „Neigung zu gesellschaftlichem Daseyn“. Versuch einer sozialtheoretischen Reformulierung des Bildungsbegriffs am Beispiel Wilhelm von Humboldts. 203
Hans-Christoph Koller

Verbinden, Verbünden, Verwandeln. Zur sozialen Funktionalität von Ironie. 221
Anne Sophie Otzen

Anerkennung von Lehrkräften als Gegenstand der Unterrichtsforschung. Theoretisch-empirische Erkundungen zur affektiven Dimension von Praktiken 239
Kerstin Rabenstein und Till-Sebastian Idel

Teil III Perspektiven einer sozialtheoretischen Erziehungswissenschaft auf Herausforderungen der Gegenwart

Der leere Blick. Nachruf auf den Augenzeugen und die Augenzeugin. . . . 261
Käte Meyer-Drawe

Longing for School: The Unexpected Impetus for a ‘New School Movement’? 275
Jan Masschelein und Maarten Simons

Anrufung und Anerkennung von eingeschränkter Rede. Über Rahmungen und Voraussetzungen akademischer Subjektivierung. 293
Christiane Thompson und Anke Engemann

Charimati Saraswati. Von Studierenden und Lehrenden in Zeiten der Identitätspolitik 313
Markus Rieger-Ladich

Diskursive Differenzierungspraktiken. Zur Verhandlung der Vulnerabilität ‚sozialer Gruppen‘ entlang von Humankategorien 335
Kristin Flugel

Klimakrise und gutes Leben. Eine sozialtheoretische Auseinandersetzung 355
Cosima Quirl

- Sartre, J.-P. 1995. *Das Sein und das Nichts. Versuch einer phänomenologischen Ontologie*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt.
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Longing for School: The Unexpected Impetus for a 'New School Movement'?

Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons

Whereas it is perhaps still too early to really evaluate how the pandemic might have transformed our ways of doing and living, it is not too early to observe that schools have been an important focus of attention throughout this health crisis. On the one hand, with school closures in many countries, a massive mobilisation of digital technology was brought forth to enable distance learning so that education could be delivered at home. Consequently, education entered the family space through small or large screens, and more often than not was dispensed in a pre-programmed, adaptive, and personalised learning environment. While we neither claim to fully understand the impact this pandemic has had, nor do we wish to presently discuss what might be termed the new or old normal, we do believe that, even before the current health crisis broke out, 'normality' was already slowly disappearing as a dominant reference in our educational thinking and acting, or at least was being overshadowed by something completely different: the glorification of the

These reflections draw on our new book: Simons, M. & J. Masschelein (2021): 'Looking after school. A critical analysis of personalization in education'.

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unique person and its accompanying drive towards individual profiling.¹ This glorification, we think, reflects a new educational organisation that was already on its way in before the pandemic began, one that demonstrates a shift from a modern *normalizing educational institution* (where the individual relates to a norm and the desire to be normal, both of which involve disciplining) towards the current-day *personalizing learning environment* (where the learner's uniqueness and need for performance/competences recognition involve instead a permanent profiling and monitoring). The way in which the digital has come to pervade education throughout this pandemic seems indeed to sustain such a shift, and further strengthens the tendency of putting 'the learner at the centre' as is increasingly advocated. In fact, some have gone so far as to argue that the pandemic ought to be celebrated as a force that might finally update (or simply do away with) an obsolescent and outdated school.

However, there was and remains a feeling of doubt concerning this shift and tendency. It has become clear that learning opportunities differ from family to family and that efficient and effective digital learning does not necessarily honour principles of equality. In addition, while digital distance learning may allow students to choose where and when to learn, this freedom of choice gets in the way of another kind of freedom: the one afforded by attentive and sustained practice and study. With the school's demise, we may have incidentally re-discovered the school, for we are also growing more and more aware that this inclination towards digital and personalized learning might actually be de-schooling the school. And if that is so, we may well end up losing the very thing we were once willing to defend, whether through re-invention or re-design—we being not only the adults that decide how to organize schools, but the youngsters as well that inhabit them.

In fact, there have been numerous and varied reactions around the world to the closing of schools and their digital cloning during this pandemic. Reactions not only from governments, policy makers, parents, and teachers, of course, but also from children and youngsters themselves. And remarkably, it has emerged that (a lot of) young people and children want to go back to school. This is all the more remarkable in view of the myriad forms of criticism, both old and new, that the school has endured, whose claims assert among other things that school is boring and alienating, is unrelated to the learner's life-world, does not take into account student needs, is mainly just a matter of disciplining and painfully outdated, or, in extreme cases, is something that must be gotten rid of once and for all (see most recently Ball and Collet-Sabés 2021). Remarkable perhaps as well given that we

¹Norbert Ricken (2018) problematized this point precisely in "Sozialität des Pädagogischen und das Problem der Individualisierung", even though he spoke of 'Individualisierung' rather than 'personalisation'.

are now talking of 'digital brains' going to school—that is, brains wired through an exposure to screens and face-books (see Stiegler 2013), having almost permanent access to the Internet and social media, anytime, anywhere. While we agree, as we will indicate, that the school needs to be reinvented, we think that this longing to go back to school should not only (and all too readily and easily) be explained away in terms of wanting to see friends (i.e., for the sake of one's school-related social life) or in terms of willing to avoid 'learning losses' (which is probably more the exclusive motive of parents and policymakers) (see Helm et al. 2021). Indeed, we want to propose the hypothesis that this longing for school² has (*also*) to do with specific pedagogical experiences (of freedom, equality, and world) that the school offers, *at least* when school *actually happens*,³ when it *operates* as school—an 'operating' that cannot simply be replaced by digital learning platforms and social media. Learning platforms and social media, which were and continue to be massively deployed throughout this pandemic, seem to have reinforced a 'personalizing regime' and to have contributed to an educational atmosphere that focuses on the unique, personalized learner.⁴ As we shall indicate, such a regime requires a particular visibility and constant profiling (and comparing), generates a permanent need for social recognition (feedback) and, hence, *tends* to install, what we would like to call, a kind of 'social terror'. Furthermore, we want to argue that it was precisely this intensified and expanding regime of personalization, related to an ongoing 'deep-mediatization'⁵ of our lives and which now includes the 'home-delivery' of education as well, that pushed young people during the pandemic to rediscover school as a form of liberation from this regime (*at least to some extent and at certain moments*) and as a breath of fresh air in an otherwise transformed

²In a very large survey in Flanders in May 2020 (44.000 children and youngsters took part) about 70% stated they were longing to go back to school. See Kenniscentrum Kinderrechten 2020. See also e.g. the UNESCO- site 'Voices of youth': 'Let's go back to school' <https://www.voicesofyouth.org/blog/lets-go-back-school>

³For a more detailed articulation of what this 'happening' is about, and for an analysis of how schools (in many guises, including 'traditional' or 'institutionalized' schools) can often be considered as de-schooled or tamed schools, see Masschelein and Simons 2013.

⁴Such a 'unique learner' does not, however, arise (naturally) once 'liberated' from the (old) normative discipline, but is produced solely by the personalizing regime. Hence, we are not diagnosing some ego-centrism or an individual-(as)-tyrant (e.g., Sadin 2020), since such an individual is, in our opinion, both effect and instrument of the said personalizing regime.

⁵"In contemporary society, even practices that are not directly related to the use of media are tangentially related to media in some ways because almost all individual practices take place within a social world where media are the fundamental reference and resource" (Gorea 2021, p. 3). See also Hepp 2020.

educational atmosphere. As a matter of fact, these young people's act of reclaiming school encourages us to further articulate what school is about.

In what follows, we first try to give a rough and limited sketch of this personalizing regime, by addressing the message it sends, the concerns it generates, and the experience (of meaningfulness and freedom) it provides. In a second step, we will suggest that this longing for school could be related to the way in which 'school' (when it operates as school and is not already de-schooled) provides an alternative kind of experience, generates different concerns, and sends another message. We will try to articulate these dissimilarities by describing the enactment of this experience, concerns and message in 'school talk' and 'schoolwork'. Finally, we will briefly indicate how this longing for school pushes us not only to further articulate what school is about, but moreover to seriously consider it as an impetus for a 'new school movement' that would not be student-centered.

1 Welcome to Your World!

As we wrote above, although it is perhaps too early to really evaluate how the pandemic (and other turmoil in which our world finds itself today) may transform our ways of doing and living, it is not too early to point out what we might call the power of a 'personalizing (governmental) regime'. This regime has been under construction for some decades now. It is a regime that installs itself through discourses and technologies, which invoke us to understand and shape/govern our lives in a specific way. To roughly sketch this regime, let us begin with a lucid description by sociologist Koen Damhuis, which will in turn shed light on the "one really great, remarkable and unquestionable phenomenon" this generation of digital natives has witnessed: "the rise of the Internet" (Damhuis 2012, p. 25).⁶ Damhuis starts from the observation that "by now each citizen seems to have become a personal enterprise; each individual the CEO of his own business" (ibid. p. 40). He speaks here of an enterprise in the sense that we have come to regard who we are and how we shape our lives as a project. Axiomatic to considering *and* experiencing life as an enterprise and project is the idea that all action implies a choice between alternatives, which are perceived as more or less attractive *options* according to the extent in which they satisfy needs or produce and offer 'added value',

⁶All translations from Dutch are ours. And, of course, we could have referred to many other authors who offer similar descriptions, and especially to Ulrich Bröckling's famous work on the entrepreneurial self (Bröckling 2002, 2007), but Damhuis' description allows us to highlight characteristics that are particularly relevant to our discussion.

and are therefore also productive (time) investments. To experience life as a personal enterprise and to consider oneself as the 'entrepreneur' of one's own life thus implies an understanding of one's life (and that of others) as the outcome or result of (informed) choices, of investments and of produced goods.⁷ These choices, moreover, are to be seen as the realization and expression of our unique personality, that is to say, as a (successful or unsuccessful) self-managed, self-determined and self-chosen personal development. The motto 'being happy by doing your thing' could be viewed as encapsulating life's mission. The message is clear: '*be yourself*', develop your potential, choose your form of life—the ideal being a life tailored to you.

This message has been particularly well understood by young people, and has gained momentum and its own dimension through the Internet and social media, or more generally "through the embeddedness of digital media in everyday life" (Gorea 2021, p. 2). Ten years ago already, Damhuis (2012) described how his generation (of young twentysomethings) experienced itself as a generation constantly confronted with the *obligation* of taking one's fate into one's own hands and making something of oneself—which could be translated as the experience of having to make choices, to choose between options. And it is this very experience which the Internet intensifies and shapes in a specific way. On the one hand, this experience unfolds in a space one might call limitless, since it is centered around the (virtual) self and can be called up anywhere, anytime. It revolves around 'you' (e.g., your personal computer, personal searches, personal profile, etc.) in the sense that 'You' was proclaimed person of the year by Time magazine as far back as 2006. As the headline on the cover page reads: "*You, yes you, control the information age. Welcome to your world.*" Yet on the other hand, the Internet is simultaneously a space where options seem endless, an enormous playing field that offers 'frameless freedom' (see also Barrico 2020). Damhuis (2012, p. 70) refers to Zygmunt Bauman and Peter Sloterdijk in this regard:

We have lost our footing because the ubiquitous sample of options makes us dizzy. Which life should we try out? Which flight should we book? (...) The world is a menu. So many choices and opportunities that you always have the experience that there may have been a better option, which you did not take advantage of. You pay a high price for that, especially in a psychological sense.

This price is not only related to the enormous precariousness of choices (which manifests itself, for example, in being able to cancel appointments up to the last minute,

⁷For more detailed analyses related to education, see Ricken 2018 and Simons and Masschelein 2021.

or formulated positively, in choosing 'better' options that might arise anytime) but conveys as well a fear of commitment and attachment. In fact, experiencing the fear of missing out (FOMO) on one's options, as theorized by capitalist marketers and authors, indicates precisely a lack of commitment to something particular, and simultaneously reflects the notion that options remain (and have to remain) open, so that in a sense FOMO is also an experience of indifference. Consequently, Damhuis calls his generation one of 'Godless pilgrims' who are constantly searching—for even with the assumption that there are good or better choices, they are without any clear idea of what those might be, travelling from place to place without roots, like ships without a compass. The Internet reveals a plethora of paths to its users, each with the accompanying questions: 'which path suits me best?' or 'what is the right option?'

It appears that the most important (if not the only) source of confirmation and legitimation of one's choices is their recognition by others. The yearning for one's own place and for 'being (or becoming) your (authentic) self' thus translates into a search for (virtual) 'friends' who might legitimize and validate one's choices. This phenomenon explains, among other things, the enormous appeal of the Internet, and especially social media, as a kind of second home (Damhuis 2012; Gorea 2021; Tolentino 2020). Together they offer virtual scenes that enable self-representation and, more importantly, allow affirmation of one's existence (as meaningful). This results in a permanent hunger for recognition that connects with the imperative of being visible to others (on the Internet and social media), and of sharing your life with them. In other words, to exist by sharing and communicating: 'with Facebook, you are connected and you share everything with everyone in your life'. Concretely, however, this sharing implies managing a personal profile. The obligation to take your fate into your own hands now becomes the obligation to profile yourself: show who you are, your 'personality', your 'authentic self' (see also Bernard 2019). Hence the permanent search for making explicit one's own opinion, one's own needs, one's own preferences, one's own experiences and perceptions.

Based on extensive empirical work, Gorea notes the following:

Many young people spend a significant amount of time selecting, editing, filtering—essentially molding their self-representation to be uploaded to the platform—using feedback and approval from their audiences as 'sufficient reward' for their authenticity work, or the visual work put into the construction of an image that fosters reliability, and 'realness' with the audience. (...) The self as an entity to be watched and edited in order to become who they want to be or shape how others see them was common among participants. Here, the self is conceptualized as an entity that always must be monitored and managed. (...) Social media act as a platform that can be wiped clean to present a new self to be either credited or discredited by judging peer groups. (...) Not only is the self now in a constant state of flux in which self-identity

changes in tandem with larger life transitions, but the self is now visible or exposed, enabling and perhaps requiring young people to share their lives with others, connect with people in their networks, and receive instantaneous feedback regarding their self-image. (Gorea 2021, p. 3, 6, 7)

As Stalder (2019) states, the self is still referred to as having an 'inner world' (interest, desires, consciousness), yet it no longer represents an essence and is not stable, but rather becomes a *position* that is always temporary and *performative* (hence one which differs from context to context). It's success now involves comparison with others, and is decided by others through feedback. The self is constituted through feedback loops in personal social networks which offer a comparative positioning that is always temporary. Rather than resembling a compass (that would provide a common orientation), they instead constitute a *social GPS* that permanently adapts to changing performance and feedback.⁸

Children, young people and parents who find themselves addressed by the imperatives of a personalizing regime 'naturally' expect customized education. The idea that everyone is unique, has personal needs, requires a unique response, and hence deserves tailor-made education, sounds today incredibly sympathetic and unassailable. However, the provision of such education (and the personalizing discourse that accompanies it) reinforces this regime and affirms the imperative of a tailor-made life, of life as a personal enterprise. Tailor-made education increasingly implies (virtual and digitalized) environments where young people are socialized in a certain understanding and modeling of life and themselves. This modeling of the self—becoming your (authentic) self—places an enormous emphasis on (pre-given) difference and comparison (i.e., being unique), couples an atmosphere of freedom (of choice) with a very great dependence on feedback, and makes the experience of a meaningful existence increasingly dependent on the permanent visibility of achievements or experiences (as performances related to profiling), as well as on social recognition, what, at least to a certain extent we might call maybe a kind of 'social terror'. Indeed, it appears that the digital apparatus and social media, at least as they largely function and operate today, strongly increase the importance of *social* recognition, *social* comparison and *social* positioning. This 'socialization' seems, on the one hand, to feed on the existential anxiety of not being socially recognized in one's personal characteristics and choices or 'options', and, on the other hand, to generate a growing indifference or despair, when confronted with the tremendous amount of options as well as personal profiles the Internet now offers, something Damhuis has

⁸This (horizontal) 'networked individuation' clearly differs from the (vertical) 'long-circuit individuation' that Stiegler (2010) reclaims as being crucial in his plea for taking care of youth.

labelled a 'fear of attachment.' It reinforces both an attraction of and dependence on the Internet and its social media 'platforms', and likewise creates serious difficulties for young people to learn to relate to them and thus also be able to distance themselves from them to some extent.⁹ As a result, experiencing other non-social or 'worldly' sources of meaningful existence (whether in terms of attachment or reality) is becoming increasingly difficult for youngsters, and they risk overlooking experiences of freedom (and joy) that are not related to personal choice or options, such as those involved in becoming able and committed to caring for a common world. It is through the lens of this 'socialization' (intensified by home delivered education during the pandemic) that we suggest grasping the longing for school of young people. We believe that youngsters re-discovered in school a different kind of freedom and a different experience of meaningfulness, one which does not refer to choices, comparisons and social recognition, but to a common exposure to the world through schoolwork in 'school-time'. Let us try to further articulate this experience of school from a pedagogical perspective.

2 Welcome to Our World: Articulating School from a Pedagogical Perspective

From a *pedagogical point of view*, school is the polemical name for a particular gathering of people and things that enables a particular kind of learning (experience): scholastic learning, which is learning under the conditions of freedom, equality and formation. Let us try to clarify what this is all about to perhaps understand what youngsters are longing for, and also begin addressing the issue of education in post-Covid times. This is not an attempt to formulate a theory of school (see Reichenbach and Bühler 2017), but rather a polemical intervention that aims to articulate scholastic events, experiences and conditions, and give voice to the school and its scandal.¹⁰ Since its invention, school enacts the pedagogical assumption that everyone can learn everything, which was promptly considered a scholas-

⁹This is naturally not to deny that social media and digital platforms offer many valuable (new) experiences and opportunities.

¹⁰We are drawing a parallel with the way in which Rancière approaches the 'scandal of democracy' (Rancière 2009, p. 116). We consider such a pedagogical voice to be very relevant given the current Covid-crisis, the related debates on the importance of school and attempts at its digital cloning. See also Larrosa 2017.

tic scandal that has resulted in all kinds of taming strategies ever since.¹¹ In practice, this assumption means that *we do not know* what a mind and body are capable of, and, consequently, that what they should or have to learn is not (naturally) pre-given. The school conveys the message that our form of life is always the *contingent* result of learning and formation,¹² the contingent outcome of what is possible, the possible outcome of *undefined* schoolwork.¹³ The scholastic condition explicitly rejects the idea that certain historical forces or a given (be it natural, social, or cultural) context might condition who we are. In particular, the school does not start from determinations (e.g., of what one might be socially or culturally, or of whom one wants to become or should become), and is not about acquiring social identities; rather, it interrupts all kinds of identifications and determinations as well as their associated pre-defined destinies. In our '*Defense of the school*' (Masschelein and Simons 2013), we tried to describe how the 'school', via its operations of separation, suspension, profanation, attention formation and grammatisation, establishes the *time* and *space* for students to face up to the challenge of giving 'a form to one's life' through the disclosing of world(s). In what follows, in order to address this new longing for school, we will share some further, though limited, indications of how the conditions of freedom, equality and formation, which characterize scholastic learning and the scholastic 'message', are actually enacted in school through examples of school-talk and schoolwork.

To understand how school-talk and schoolwork enact these conditions and message, it is helpful to start off by referring to Bruno Latour's (2010) comments on love-talk, where he shows how a very banal sentence such as "I love you", when truly said in a concrete situation, has the power to affect or *transform* both the listener and the speaker and to *modify* time and space. It changes space because I am really saying: "I was away but now I'm near you, I love you". It also changes time since when such a sentence is uttered, it offers the possibility for a new time to begin—the time of our love. Finally, it also changes the past for it incites us to reconsider and think differently about our past. Therefore, this sentence transforms time and space and turns something into a matter of care or concern.

¹¹In line with Rancière's indication of "the original formula of the democratic scandal: (...) the formulation of political power as 'power without power'" (Rancière 2017, p. 119), we suggest as the scholastic scandal's original formula: everyone can learn everything. For an elaboration, see Verburgh et al. 2016.

¹²For an extensive study of this aspect of contingency, see Ricken 1999.

¹³We borrow the notion of 'undefined work of freedom' from Foucault. For a further elaboration, see Simons and Masschelein 2019. This elaboration relies on a reading of Foucault's work which supports a defense of the school, in contrast to, for example, Ball's and Collet-Sabé's plea 'against school' (2021).

We can say something similar about school-talk. It is a distinctive kind of speech, which includes a particular vocabulary, but is foremost a distinctive mode of expression and tonality. Truly scholastic speech affects space, time, and matter, creates the conditions for one to become a student or schoolteacher and to confront worlds. This transformative force can be captured in three variations of a single paradigmatic expression: 'try'.

Try

There are perhaps few other such 'banal' phrases that are used as frequently in a classroom. It is an order, yet at the same time an expression of concern; it expresses authority, but contains an invitation as well. 'Try' clearly assumes that someone is not yet able to do something, but it foremost appeals to a state of becoming able. In fact, reasons often abound to assume one needn't even try: sociological, psychological or neurological reasons, of course, as well as those related to one's past performance. In some cases, even students themselves will find reasons to assume that something is simply not for them, that it is nothing that they could or even would like to do. In contrast, school-talk is about saying 'try' *despite all reasons*: it *assumes* an ability and *creates* the experience of being able. One could say that someone becomes a student the very moment they accept the invitation to try—that is, when becoming a student is understood in terms of experiencing an ability to do (something) or to begin (with something), which is what we mean by the experience of *pedagogical freedom*.¹⁴ The statement 'try' interrupts the chronological timeline, where past defines future. The student that says 'yes, I will' is drawn *into the present moment* as a moment of possibility, defined neither by the past nor the future.

While the invitational part of the expression addresses one's ability, the authoritative part is oriented instead towards the will. The teacher who says 'try' to someone else is in fact willing that the other be willing to try (see also Rancière 1991). What makes the willing (of the teacher) convincing is the belief in the ability (of the student) which the phrase expresses, *when truly said in a concrete situation*. But what is this willing about exactly? Asking someone to try something implies asking them to make an effort, and to engage in particular kinds of study activities or exercises. Yet these activities have a certain lightness to them as well since they are part of an attempt. We might therefore see how the expression 'try' also has the power to transform one's inhabited space: a kind of safe space is created (implying also a certain 'invisibility'), in the sense that there are no specific

¹⁴This pedagogical freedom is hence neither juridical nor political, and certainly not an issue of choice.

(external) consequences attached to whether the effort leads to results or not. In fact, the only consequence would be the invitation to try again. As a student, one inhabits a space where the effort and activities are meaningful in of themselves. The terms 'practice' or 'exercise' refer precisely to this sort of study effort. Consequently, a particular kind of freedom is at stake in school practice and exercise—which is not to be confused with the freedom of choice!

School practice refers to typical schoolwork, such as reading words aloud, preparing and making a class presentation, learning foreign words or mathematical formulas by heart, doing physical exercises, or making drawings, to name but a few examples. This schoolwork requires serious effort, and its meaning cannot be derived or defined from the outcome of the work. From an economic or social utility perspective, the products and hence the work itself are somehow useless. It is perceived as *just being schoolwork*. The value, however, resides with the student. Michel Foucault's (2007) expression of an "undefined work of freedom" articulates very nicely what is at stake in schoolwork (see Simons and Masschelein 2019). School practice or exercise always includes an element of indetermination. At this point, engaging with 'grammar' in schoolwork becomes crucial; not only the grammar of language but also those of the world of nature, arts, etc. A grammar is not meant to define (like a norm, for example) but to open up possibilities. This is not to say that schoolwork does not have aims. Schoolwork on writing, reading, calculation, or drawing is about creating conditions for someone to be(come) able to write, to read, to calculate, or to draw; these school specific aims of literacy, however, are different from attempts to produce writers, mathematicians, artists, etc. Schoolwork is about becoming able, and giving oneself a shape, not about pre-determining the actualisation of these abilities in view of a pre-defined form or image of the educated subject.

Try again, also you!

This expression articulates a sense of optimism, a belief in the student's abilities notwithstanding their past. It also expresses patience. 'Try again' is about giving someone a second chance, or even a third or fourth chance. It reinforces the belief that everyone can learn everything and intervenes to protect students against the influence of natural or social forces, which seek to bind them to their past and define their abilities. The verbal intervention 'try again' interrupts the linear timeline in which a student's past determines her future; it empties space (momentarily) from all sorts of profiling and diagnosing; it creates a spacetime where someone can become a student once again, experiencing a state of becoming able to do something. What the instruction 'try again' does is inscribe equality as a condition for school learning.

This *pedagogical equality* follows from the typical freedom of school learning. If a young person's (social) position is not used from the outset to define (the future), this means that everyone, regardless of their origin or identity, has the chance to practice and find themselves a proper form. The equality created through the expression 'try again, also you' is different from personalizing approaches that make students unequal, firstly, by defining or re-defining who and what they are in social or natural terms (e.g., in terms of talents, 'natural' aptitudes or social characteristics), and, secondly, by predefining learning trajectories based on the observed natural or social 'givens'. The message in 'try again' is not to define or re-define, but to 'undefine'. The traces of someone's past are not ignored or forgotten, but the expression 'try again' makes clear that they no longer cast a shadow on someone's present abilities. The school does not address children *starting from* their familial, economic, social, cultural background, or their diagnosed abilities and disabilities: this would be de-schooling school, and defining their future based on their past. In contrast, the school's starting point is to address young people at the level of their ability to shape their lives.

Try this

'Try this' is likewise a crucial expression to see what school learning is about. It points at something outside, something not yet part of someone's lifeworld. 'Try this' contradicts the idea that school learning is only about the person (and the lifeworld) of the student. It ensures that giving shape to oneself—through schoolwork—passes always through the outside.¹⁵ This instruction orients a student's effort towards specific schoolwork and specific subject matters. The expression assumes that there isn't always a natural inclination towards doing something new, thus necessitating an intervention and serious effort. Specifying what should be tried means defining the effort, the activities, and the abilities involved, without actually defining schoolwork. It remains an invitation to give something a try. School learning enables students for example to read, write and calculate, but this form of learning does not try to determine the exact usage of this reading, writing and calculating by trying to shape students according to a predefined form of life. In essence, the grammars of different worlds are made available but never are they employed to define the work of freedom. Of course, there have been many attempts to impose a particular form of the literate citizen or the educated subject, but that would be akin to de-schooling (or taming) school.

¹⁵For an exciting elaboration, see also Serres 1997.

As we have indicated, the scholastic 'try this' states that school learning is not about the student qua person. It is not student-centered but concerns the world. Therefore, neither does the school *start* from (self-defined or other-defined) differences nor does it emphasize them. It opens up worlds (the worlds of language, mathematics, nature, art, sports...) in such a way that these worlds might begin to speak to, interest and form the learner. As a 'place of work', the school is a place where experiences of meaning are not primarily mediated by social recognition of choices and the visibility of performances, but is mediated by the work that takes place there and the form in which such work takes place: practicing, studying, trying as forms of work. This is the work in which one knows oneself confronted with a world that can be simultaneously inviting and appealing, both in its enigma and beauty as well as its challenges, resistance and 'objectivity'. And it is through this schoolwork that one experiences the ability to participate in that world and thus begins to belong to that world. It is a work that silences the noise of social traffic, as Michel Serres (2011) says, and lets us hear the music of the world, which can in turn offer us a lasting source of meaning and, hence, of formation. Of course, in a scholastic workplace there also plays a certain desire of being seen, of being visible, but here that does not mean being recognized in one's uniqueness, but rather means receiving attention and care in one's practicing, one's trying, one's studying. Such a workplace creates a time for practicing, studying, trying, as 'free(d) time'. It is a special time for the transfer or sharing of knowledge and abilities. It is neither the time of productive transfer in functions of socialization or efficient knowledge construction, nor is it about speeding up and adding value, or obtaining learning gains as fast, efficient and smooth as possible. School time, on the contrary, is a time that simultaneously slows down and intensifies the 'transfer' because school is a place where what is shared is also put on the table for study, offered in a *grammatized* way, therefore *inviting a collective conversation*.¹⁶ There is always an interruption in the transmission, and in pedagogical terms it is precisely this interruption, the in-between of the table, the friction of the conversation and the artificiality of the grammars—and not a kind of direct, natural, frictionless transmission from head to head, hand to hand, screen to screen—that allows newcomers to appear as a (new) generation(al force) along with a pedagogical freedom that can be enacted to renew the world. School takes place and is actually "time (...) in which we are (...) free for the world"—which is precisely how Hannah Arendt translates the Greek word

¹⁶Although we have no room elaborate on this point, we would like to note that given the current push towards increased personalization (including the personalization of information), it may be appropriate to recall the importance of collective work and of 'building a school collective' to deal with (and partly resist) such forces. See Querrien et al. 2012.

scholè, where our word school comes from (Arendt 1960/2006, p. 202). Let us add in closing that ‘free for the world’ means to be temporarily freed from one’s family (i.e., from the condition of being a son or daughter, and becoming instead a student—which is particularly relevant in our times of home delivered education), from economic imperatives (e.g., not being an apprentice in a real labor situation), or from societal expectations (e.g., not being a permanent learner governed by societal forces or adult ideals). Finally, today this could mean as well to be temporarily freed from what we might call the rising terror and noise of ‘the social’, which is currently strengthened by the digital revolution, and especially social media, and constitutes a flipside to the increasing personalization of education.

3 A New School Movement?

Let us briefly summarize our position: we believe that schools spread the message that who you are is not just the product of social, physical and historical forces, or of any other context for that matter, but also the contingent result of study and exercise, as a practice of encountering worlds and as an undefined work of freedom. Moreover, the scholastic condition enables youngsters to give shape and direction to this freedom by disclosing worlds in particular, grammatized and seducing ways, while simultaneously offering protection against the social and societal forces that entail socialization, as well as the economic forces that enhance marketization and capitalization of their activities and attention.

We witnessed a remarkable event unfold throughout this pandemic: children and students coming to the defense of school education. It is almost as if their actions and longing pointed to a core existential feature of school education, something which cannot simply be replaced by online digital learning environments and social networks. Could we maybe say that youngsters have experienced today what it means and feels like to be closed off from world exposure? And, consequently, could we perhaps add that their longing for school expresses missing the experience of a certain freedom and a certain equality? Not the freedom of choice but the freedom of being able (to begin with something from the world—and hence to be in the company of this something). Nor a juridical or social equality, but the equality of being a pupil or student like any other, which means the equality of being (at least for some time and to a certain extent) undefined by one’s family, nature and social background, or predefined images of a desired end (such as the educated person or the good citizen). Young people seem to have expressed that the school, *when it operates as a school*, not only allows one to see and make friends, to be with peers, but allows as well for a certain liberation from social pressure, from

being locked into the social sphere (either with or without social media), the sphere of concern for a certain kind of recognition (through likes, views, recognition of identity or performance),¹⁷ and of concern for personal emotional states, which in the end can never ‘really’ be shared. Children and students may well have experienced in their longing what school truly offers: access to worlds, giving them the opportunity in class, through work and play, to (collectively) discover and dwell in shared worlds. Perhaps we should take this as an impetus for a ‘new school movement’ that resists the increasing personalization of education.

We therefore have to ask whether the way in which the digital is currently shaping our present state of education and contributing to its transformation into personalized learning environments is not depriving youngsters of the time-space of pedagogical freedom and equality, along with the disclosing of and belonging to a shared world (see Dussel 2018, 2020). To reformulate this digital issue in a positive way: Can we further imagine new educational practices *with the digital* that generate ‘free time’ or ‘time for the world’? Can we ensure that digital practices will embody school talk? Speak a language that is inviting and seducing in a strong sense, defying indifference and the fear of attachment? That says, ‘try’, and not, ‘if so, then do this; and if this, then do that...’? Are there new practices that make us belong to a shared world and do not lock us up into ‘our world’? The digital now allows an access to knowledge and skills, along with a connectivity to others that is unprecedented, but we suspect that the digital experience that accompanied the pandemic has led youngsters to the awareness that this ‘social’ is not what school is about. Hence, the question remains to know how the digital might contribute to the reimagining and reinvention of the school as a space-time that realizes pedagogical freedom and equality, and furthermore guarantees that worlds are not only ‘seen’ or ‘swiped’ but get the chance to ‘form’ and leave traces (i.e., to resonate (see Rosa 2019) and vibrate (see Barrico 2020)). We believe that this reinvention of the school *with the digital* will require considering what forms of work, including collective schoolwork, might help make freedom, equality, and formation possible in our digital times. It certainly will require passionate teachers who are willing to say ‘try’ in all its variations, in order to undo the privatizing, accelerating and personalizing logics of learning platforms, to interrupt the socializing forces of the media (including social media), and to let the music of the world be heard. Putting the school at the centre of concern means putting the world at the centre, and this means precisely doing justice to the coming generation in a *pedagogical* way: to make it possible for young people to become students and make it possible for the

¹⁷ We don’t want to discuss in depth the issue of recognition. For an elaboration, see Simons and Masschelein 2021 and Genel and Deranty 2020.

world to be cared for. Perhaps this is all at stake in the event that has been unfolding before our eyes of young people reclaiming school today—and, who knows, maybe it might just turn out to be the impetus for a (new) ‘new school movement’ after all?

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