

The return of pedagogic:ⁱ On the Dutch translation of Klaus Mollenhauer's Vergessene Zusammenhänge

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The Disappearance and Return of Pedagogic

In the seventies, the translators of *Vergessene Zusammenhänge* (Ciske Balhan and myself) studied education at the University of Leiden. We specialized in social-educational theory ('social pedagogic') and we studied Klaus Mollenhauer. He was a well-known educationalist who conceptualized the field of social education in West Germany, with a focus on youth care and youth welfare services. But we also knew Mollenhauer in another way; he was one of the key representatives of German Critical Pedagogic. I read his *Erziehung und Emancipation* (first published in 1968). The book is a plea for democratic education; a dialogue between parents and their children, teachers and their students, youngsters and their educators. According to Mollenhauer the regulative idea of the educational dialog should be rationality. "The rationality of the subjects who are under the responsibility of educators should be stimulated, not disrupted" (Mollenhauer 1971, p. 70). I was an enthusiastic supporter of his ideas. In 1974, his *Theorien zum Erziehungsprozess* appeared in Dutch. Two years before it was published in West Germany. The title *Het kind en zijn kansen* ('The child and his opportunities') was misleading. The book did not deal with opportunities – it tried to conceptualize education in three different ways: hermeneutics, social science and criticism. The central issues were communication, interaction and reproduction... it was a rather difficult book. The Dutch translation didn't help me comprehend it. So, I bought the German book and read it a number of times. The more I read it, the more the book triggered me. I was fascinated especially by the way Mollenhauer used theories rooted in social science. The book showed that theories can be used as instruments to conceptualize and analyse educational problems. As a former teacher in special education, I knew that problems are the starting point of education, not solutions. Solutions in education are always in the making; they are provisory.

Mollenhauer gave me a new insight into educational studies. In the seventies, those studies were in a process of transformation. Until the end of the sixties, value-laden educational theory dominated the educational field. The Utrecht professor Martinus Langeveld was the most well-known educationalist in the country and a phenomenologist. His area of focus lay in the quotidian experience. Langeveld wanted to create a theory based upon the educational practice – a value-laden theory, a perspective on educational practices, pedagogic (in Dutch: '*pedagogiek*'). In the seventies, this pedagogic was increasingly brushed aside. The social sciences were up and coming. They could improve the process of learning and development and they could help to improve the opportunities for young children. Pedagogic transformed into philosophy of education and became the area of values and norms, and increasingly the place where the foundations of sciences were brought up for discussion. Within this transformation, pedagogic became an intellectual, educational 'free port'. Mollenhauer contradicted the notion that social sciences hold all solutions to challenges within educational

studies. He suggested that, in education, solutions aren't the main issue. Problems are. Pedagogic helps the educator perceive those problems and find solutions, in an appropriate educational manner.

During our educational studies at the University, the studies began appearing as patchwork. There were so many theories, concepts, methodologies and methods. Social education, in particular, turned out to be a patchwork of theories and methods. But, what for? What was their purpose? We had a lot of discussions on the issue. Those discussions always ended up with political statements. But a political statement isn't yet an educational statement. The political sets conditions for education, but the political isn't educational yet. At the end of the seventies, we finished our studies and got jobs. Ciske became a teacher at a school of social work; I became a teacher-educator at a training institute for kindergarten teachers. And, again, we encountered this patchwork of theories and methods. What should we teach our students? What were we aiming for? What did we want our students to achieve? And, how did we hope they would put it into practice? These were educational questions. Questions about the quintessence of teaching. What is at stake when we are teaching?

At that time, I read *Vergessene Zusammenhänge*. Here, I found answers to the questions we were struggling with. I suggested to Ciske we translate it together. She agreed. We made a trial translation of the *Introduction* of the book; we found a publisher and began. It took us more than two years to finish the translation. It wasn't an easy job and we weren't professional translators. In translating the book we gradually learned to translate. To translate requires an engagement and involvement with the writer's ideas and methods. The author teaches the translator. To an extent, as the translator, you integrate the author's ideas into your own language. That means changing your system; changing your language. However, our language is Dutch; this language has its own laws. So, being taught means changing your system and language without violating the underlying laws. A reader can read a translated text with uncommon ideas and concepts, but he should read it in a common language. In fact, we learned that translating is an art of self-cultivation. The translator is challenged by the author of a text – he starts to think within the lines of the text he translates, but also within the lines of the language he is translating the text into. This is exactly what Mollenhauer calls *Selbstätigkeit*: a process of self-activity, of self-starting. Starting within the lines the educator indicates, which afterwards the subject always could leave. So, it turned out that Mollenhauer was not only the author of the book we translated... he became our educator.

Mollenhauer was educated in the fifties; first as a schoolteacher. Later, he studied several subjects, including pedagogic at the universities of Hamburg and Göttingen. His educator and PhD supervisor was Erich Weniger, at that time, a well-known educationalist taking part in the German *geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik*. The focus of this pedagogic is a cultural one; education is a relational process aiming at the subjectivity and cultural formation (German: 'Bildung') of children and youngsters. The process of formation can't be caused; it is a process of self-cultivation. That is the reason that it can't be explained fully by external factors. It can be understood, though. Interpretation is therefore the basic method of the *geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik*. Quite soon, Mollenhauer gave up this pedagogic stance. He criticised its idealistic approach. The cultural formation of children and youngsters is imbedded in societal structures in which power and economical processes are at work. However, he didn't give up the importance of interpretation. Education focuses on a process of self-formation, self-cultivation. The educator can't cause self-formation... she can challenge the child or youngster to form himself. She can invite him, help him, but she can't do it for him. It is the child or youngster who should do it. Formation, viz. cultivation is a process of self-activity. The child or youngster isn't an object of intervention; he is a subject who, in the end, is responsible for himself and his fellow humans. This is the quintessence of education.

Bildung and What Came After

For us, the translators of the book, the book's message was: education is not a process of making. This was exactly contrary to the message we gradually got during our studies, i.e. that the social science could make it. Through explanation, educators can make education better. Mollenhauer taught us: it is not like that. Education depends on self-formation. But, he taught us more. To inspire the self-formation, viz. self-cultivation of her students, a teacher should present and represent the world; she should show the world directly (presentation) and indirectly (representation). Without a presented and represented world, a child will never come to self-cultivation.

It seems that Mollenhauer introduced a new educational vocabulary. However, the vocabulary was not new at all. In his book, he re-introduced an old European, educational tradition. The Dutch educationalist Langeveld took part in the same tradition. Starting in the sixties, the process of educational modernisation pushed this tradition to the background. Learning and development were emphasized - those processes could be caused. Mollenhauer didn't focus on them. He focused on the societal and cultural imbedded self-formation, viz. self-cultivation of children; he focused on *Bildung*. We translated *Bildung* with 'vorming' ('formation'). The Dutch 'vorming' means, as the English 'formation': to take form. However, a 'Bild' in German is not a form; it is an image. *Bildung* has theological roots. Humans are created in God's image. The modern significance of *Bildung* means self-creation, not by use of the image of God, but by cultural images. So, *Bildung* approaches identity, with a self-cultivated image. The last chapter of *Vergessene Zusammenhänge* deals with this issue. According to Mollenhauer, identity is a fiction. It is an ideal; it indicates how we would be. This ideal challenges us; it helps us to shape our selves, to form, viz. to cultivate how we would like to be. It helps us to come into the world in a 'cultivated' and responsible manner. And because every child is *bildsam*, prepared to self-formation, every child has the possibility to do so.

We translated *bildsam* with 'vatbaar voor vorming' ('open to self-formation'). Every child has the possibility to cultivate himself. However, without education, this possibility can't be realised. Without an educator or a teacher who presents and represents the world and challenges the child to become a self-starter, *Bildsamkeit* will go unrealised. Again, there is fiction involved – the fiction that dictates we can prepare ourselves for self-formation. The belief in allows the teacher to challenge the student to make it real. Self-formation, viz. self-cultivation is the central point of Mollenhauer's vocabulary. However, he didn't present it as a solution; he presented it as an educational problem. The pedagogical approach to this problem is, in it's essence, a belief; the belief that the child or youngster is open to self-formation.

Now, thirty years have passed. The modernisation in the field of education has continued steadily. The former, small professional schools were integrated in large institutions. 'Outcomes' is the buzzword nowadays; developmental and learning processes should be strengthened, the outcomes measured, the institutions accredited. But, there is a counter-movement. Teachers protest, managers complain about the ever-increasing number of rules and regulations, there are discussions in the media, politicians discuss bureaucratisation in education. Even the prestigious Dutch 'Counsel of Education' ('Onderwijsraad') joined the discussion and tried to find a way out of the narrow vision on education. A sign is the publication of the Council of *Onderwijs vormt* ('Education forms'), a plea for the re-introduction of *Bildung* in Dutch education. It was published on request of the First Chamber. Recent years have seen more publications that re-introduce classical educational themes (Levering 2010; Van Crombrugge 2009; Biesta 2012; Masschelein & Simons 2012; Van Stralen & Gude 2012; Meijer 2013). *Bildung* is coming back on the educational agenda.

And, what about the Dutch translation of *Vergessene Zusammenhänge*? The book got several reprints. It was mainly used at universities and it turned out to be too complex for teacher

education. However, the ‘educational spirit’ of the book inspired several Dutch educationalists to write pedagogical books especially for teacher education (Pols, Levering & Miedema 1995; Geerdink, Volman & Wardekker 2006; Goorhuis-Brouwer & Imelman 2010; Berding & Pols 2014). It seems that pedagogic returns.

Endnotes

- i. In the Dutch language a difference is made between ‘pedagogie’ (‘pedagogy’) and ‘pedagogiek’ (‘pedagogic’). The former refers to the practice of education (and the methods put in practice), the latter refers to the unity of theory and practice of upbringing and education.

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