This is the accepted version of a paper presented at NFPF / NERA’s 45th Congress, Learning and Education – Material Conditions and Consequences, 23-25 March, 2017, Copenhagen.

Citation for the original published paper:

Kraus, A. (2017)
Didactics and the Tacit Dimensions of Competences.
In: Presented at: NERA 2017

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:lnu:diva-68310
Exploring Material Conditions as Tacit Dimensions of Competences – The Hidden Curriculum of Online-Games

Anja Kraus

The World Government Summit

“[…] brings together leaders from the public and private sectors as well as thought leaders and pioneers to engage in a thought provoking and future focused dialogue that will shape the future of governments and help improve the lives of citizens across the world”¹. (The Economist Corporate Network 2016, 2)

The selected few came to the following agenda (ibid.):

“Digitisation has fundamentally altered the way we live, businesses operate, governance is undertaken, and has enabled the state of hyper-connectivity that binds us together.”

This agenda concerns a very wide range of diverse applications of digital means, including scientific fields such as aeronautics, bioinformatics, and many others, as well as the practical use of digital devices in administration, industry, etc.

Another agenda that also is supposed to decide on “the future of governments and improvement of the lives of citizens across the world” is education. Education is all over the world regarded as central to democratic societies.

The overlap between the two challenges, digitization and education is broad and multiform. In the field of practical education especially one arena of digitization is of outstanding importance: the online-gaming sector. I chose the investigation of the meaning of digital gaming expressed in advertisement for my analytical access to both of the agendas, digitization and education.

To quote one out of the infinite quantity of advertisements for online-games:

“Crafted by a team of veteran PC and console developers (BioShock, BioShock Infinite, Dead Space), Perception offers a bold and fresh take on first person narrative games.

• “See” using echolocation. Every sound creates a visual.
• Engage in a deadly game of hide and seek with relentless enemies, including The Presence.
• Trigger radical change at the Estate at Echo Bluff each time you solve its mysteries.
• Travel back through history to exorcise your own nightmares.”

(see https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/perceptiongame/perception-3?lang=de)

¹ See homepage: https://worldgovernmentsummit.org/
The here-expressed promises of “seeing” (insight?), presence and social relationships (if only with “enemies” and with oneself, respectively with the own “nightmares”), game, change, adventure, mystery, self-understanding and history cover a whole range of key concepts in pedagogy. However, they are connected to practices that are certainly not pedagogically desired like “exorcise” or “engage in a deadly game”. The occupation of pedagogical topics by non-pedagogical practices is an interesting and widespread phenomenon that I follow up in another context. Here, please just hold it in mind and let us follow another trace: that of a material didactics announced in the advertisement, especially in: “Every sound creates a visual”, and (you will) “trigger radical change each time you solve its mysteries”.

These sentences contain a promise that, as a phenomenon of multimodality, material (sounds) creates material (visuals) without any person in power; the gamer him-/herself triggers radical change without major efforts, as s/he just uncovers already given, but hidden mysteries. Expressed are thus two modes of a thing showing itself: there is not only the promise of learning without a teacher and without any need of real social engagement. There is also mysticism expressed that causes ecstatic or an altered state of consciousness and even a change of the world in a quasi-religious or spiritual meaning. The didactical triangle is here reduced to the relation of a passive learner and a thing that shows itself. The gamer is modelled as a kind of prophet or enlightened who reveals this thing.

My hypothesis is that behind this concept stands a promise to ban the, what Klaus Prange (2005) describes as, “the gesture of showing in education”. That is to say: Usually, pedagogically framed learning means that a teacher shows something by verbal-discursive or gestural means with the aim of enabling a learner to explicate this “thing” him-/herself. The “thing” is then what the teacher shows that it is and nothing else. The educator may appear as almighty to the learner. In the prototypical educational gesture all material, social, imaginary, corporal and spatial realities and hyperrealities get subjected to the “structure of showing”; until the learner takes over.

In the scope of the antiauthoritarian movement, a pedagogically transferred already given order is seen as “black pedagogy” (cp. Rutschky 1993). In relation to this, even very famous pedagogical theorists, e.g. Maria Montessori, are blamed for the concept of an “order of the things”. Montessori speaks of a “prepared environment” which, as Winfried Böhm (2010) points out, in the end may serve repressive social orders. One of the sharpest critics of the concept of a pre-stabilized “order of the things” is Michel Foucault. He describes it as so called “tableaux vivants” (Foucault 1998), which he counts as the most important means of a pedagogy aiming at discipline and restraint. “Tableaux vivants” form a space in which the given variety of the functions and rankings of the “things” form a clear and well-ordered pattern, according to which the individuals (e.g. by division of labour forcibly) adapt themselves. This order, according to Foucault (1998, p.191), is “ [...] the condition for the control of and the making an entity of elements useful: the basis of a microphysics of power that one could call ’cell formed’ [stressed by M.F.]”. He continues: “Taxonomy is the space of discipline of vital beings” (ibid.), the discipline that is meant here only serves for control aiming at the stabilization of the existing social power structures. A pedagogy, which conceptualizes “tableaux vivants”, starting from a certain given order of discipline, does not succeed in following up the pedagogical aim of reducing pedagogy by fostering self-
determination and responsibility. The shown as a means to a certain end is, according to Foucault, moreover attributed to imperative social forces and power structures.

To come back to the passive learner idea and the idea of a *thing that shows itself*: “Every sound creates a visual, you will trigger radical change each time you solve its mysteries.” There is no teacher here, and no other real persons. The digital simulations dissolved from reality and became simulacra, as Jean Baudrillard (1981) puts it. Baudrillard (1981) describes a simulacrum as a simulation without any original having become a truth and a hyperreality in its own right. As a kind of ‘too much reality’ generated from mere ideas, a hyperreality breaks down the boundary between real and imaginary, truth and artificiality. Foreign to reality, hyperreality is at the same time not distinguishable from reality. The perception of a hyperreality has the character of make-believe, not directed to facts. As digital gaming applies nearly all symbolic features of the real world, referring to activities of building and destructing, as well as to the motions of profiting and being damaged, it causes “tableaus vivants” that have to be uncovered. There are no more creators and no more teachers who show something to somebody.

This is done without recognizing most of the fundamental needs of the living body (like sleeping etc.). Baudrillard (1981) presupposes that our perception is affected even in terms of “the death of the real”. This expression evokes the above-mentioned figure of life-facing concepts that in digital gaming are supposed to evolve in maximum contrast to development and life. Such a maximum itself is no problem, as long as it remains in the world of simulacra and hyperrealities. However, a possibly violent aspect of this figure consists in its rather extensive, but at the same time in a way self-defeating social approval, and this not least true for the school of today.

One could state that digital gaming happens apart from school and that it is a mere leisure activity, and, in the classroom we can still find presence, social relationships and history. One may even argue that to manoeuvre between the Scylla of a pre-stabilized “order of the things” and “tableaus vivants”, with Jacques Lacan fixing the real, and the Charybdis of simulacra and hyperrealities (with Jacques Lacan: the symbolic) alive is the central task of the teacher in the classroom. However, I see some rather difficult hindrances for this work:

Coming to the didactical triangle: Traditionally, it is up to the teachers to use at best open learning settings in order to raise the visibility of the pupils’ dispositions, conditions and modes and ways of learning. However, in the last decennium and worldwide, national curriculum reforms have led to fundamental changes in the educational system. The ultimate aim of education has been redefined as the acquisition of measurable competences rather than that of profound knowledge. The desired output is presupposed and it is tested independently from the very classroom situation. One can perceive a significant flashback to direct instruction in the classrooms (Adams & Engelmann 1996, Hattie 2013, Helsper & Lingkost 2015). In direct instruction the very prototype for nearly all questions put by teachers is “what do the things show us?” that is directed to an already presupposed order. Accordingly, foremost maieutic modes of imparting information are preferred. That is to say, knowledge is elicited in the mind of a person by interrogating and insisting on close and logical reasoning. At the same time, the attainment of subject knowledge for its own sake has been superseded by the acquisition of useful skills for everyday life. (Böhle et al. 2004) According to
Weinert’s (2001) template for the PISA-studies, competences are understood as facilitating active, open-minded, exploratory, dialogical and empathetic approaches to particular challenges in society, school and private life. The most important competence in this respect is the ability and willingness to learn from personal experiences. According to this educational goal, especially approaches to learning become a central theme of the classes in school. Those approaches today are, first of all, ciphered out as learning strategies. The pupils are assessed in terms of their performance. Their competence development does not really need a teacher, at most, only as a role model. The gesture of showing in education is foremost replaced by well-defined models of the right way to act. That means in the worst case the pupils act like dolls along the competence models, and they become “tableaus vivants” in a hyperreal scenario.

Then, the pattern of the overlap of digitization and education I worked out above and praised by the selected few as future perspective appears not only as a huge education project without any responsible. It also only pretends to provide insight, presence, social relationships and history as the true purpose is to follow the rules of machinery. It has thus a rather clear signature of totalitarianism.

In order to preserve the teacher’s role as a sounding board for too much imaginary and for too rigid orders, I will depart from another, the body-phenomenological practice-theoretical angle: It is a well-experienced phenomenon that “[…] the How of learning retreats into darkness” (Meyer-Drawe 2004: 90). This causes quite severe problems for the teachers in classes of up to 30 pupils. The heterogeneity of the pupils regarding their horizons of experiences, also learning experiences, is to a great deal hidden. Therefore, an individualized competence development is a huge challenge for a single teacher. And, I would like to insist: learning settings should be set up to structure learning and to raise the visibility of probable learning. Mere output-measuring and mystical passivity are in the outskirts of education and pedagogy, but not its core. To teach means to pave the way for a vivid communication in the classroom. The Scylla of a pre-stabilized “order of the things” and “tableaus vivants” (with Jacques Lacan: the real), and the Charybdis of simulacra and hyperrealities always play a certain role in such a communication, but the critical outside-position has urgently to be preserved.