This is the accepted version of a paper presented at 6. Conference of the international scientific network „Tacit Dimensions of Pedagogy“ at the Linnéuniversitetet Växjö.

Citation for the original published paper:

Kraus, A. (2016)
“Education is Relation not Output?”: Scenes of Knowledge and Knowledge Acquisition.
In:

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-70407
Education is Relation not Output? Scenes of Knowledge and Knowledge Acquisition

Anja Kraus

Re-thinking the idea of university and scholarly life means to critically examine the conditions for teaching in terms of the current policy discourses and freely develop an idea of university out of an international perspective. We start from the statement that university does not exist simply to convey information or expertise, but is a society in which everyone is responsible for in a reflected way participating in diverse relationships to him-/herself, to others and to the world, and, based on diverse forms of knowledge and representation, actively forming them. Diverse perspectives on university as a place for social development will be opened up by academic scholars as well as by professionals in the fields of school as well as of art.


Research on university within the Humanities, Cultural and Educational Sciences (e.g. Jaspers [1946] 1980, Heinrich 1987, Hug 1996, Bourdieu 2002, Derrida 2004, Masschelein & Simons 2009) is relatively rare and quite neglected in university development today (Groppe 2014). Hannah Arendts writes in “Truth and Politics” (1967, S.**, transl. by the author): ”[…] whether places of higher learning are in private or in public hands is of no great importance; the freedom of teaching and learning must be accepted and protected by the government just like the fundamental impartiality of justice. Very unwelcome truths have emerged from the universities, and very unwelcome judgments have been handed down from the bench time and again; and these institutions, like other refuges of truth, have remained exposed to all the dangers arising from social and political power. […] And it can hardly be denied that, at least in constitutionally ruled countries, the political realm has recognized,
even in the event of conflict, that it has a stake in the existence of men and institutions over which it has no power.” Following Arendt, the question how to connect what one wants and thinks to what one does stands in the foreground. The reference to the initiatives by artists to create university, like the “Free International University” founded Joseph Beuys & Klaus Staeck and the “Institut fuer Raumexperimente” founded by the artist Olafur Eliasson can be of help to answer this question. In their “Manifesto on the foundation of a ‘Free International School for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research” of 1973 Joseph Beuys and Heinrich Böll point out that they will not marginalisation letting be: “Its chief goal is the encouragement, discovery and furtherance of democratic potential, and the expression of this. In a world increasingly manipulated by publicity, political propaganda, the culture business and the press, it is not to the named – but the nameless [scil. I would say unexplored] – that it will offer a forum.” Olafur Eliasson 2009 describes his “Institute for Spatial Experiments” in Berlin as “[…] an experiment. To me, the experiment as a mode of inquiry is necessary if we are to insist on a constant, probing and generous interaction with reality. Or to put it differently: by engaging in experimentation, we can challenge the norms by which we live and thus produce reality.”

These three approaches connect the fundamental idea of university deeply to the idea of Bildung and to cultural (democratic) values. This traditional, quite habitual and nearly blind association is today mainly used in arguments for a university that does not only convey information or expertise in terms of output, but also general reflexive skills. However, there are some unmistakable signs that the humanists of today did not quite succeed yet in explaining why Bildung and culture are important for the development of society today. If university shall serve as an open space for the development of democracy meeting the huge social, cultural and ecological challenges of today one continuously has to critically review the approaches to scientific research and their interdependences with political and politically relevant discourses. Why is the responsibility of the Humanities outstanding in this regard?

There is at least two answers:

At first, there is not only the distinction of theoretical and practical knowledge, but a wide range of knowledge forms constituting diverse knowledge formats. Karl Mannheim (**) speaks of fields of knowledge. He thinks of them not in terms of learnt facts but in terms of all kinds of knowledge stocks underlying social phenomena. Thus, knowledge formats are understood as the decisive references when giving answers to the social and cultural tasks of today. Philosophic, scientific, aesthetic and other symbols and sign systems have complex relationships to one another. University can maintain its role as archive for universals and as a community, dealing with questions of highest environmental value only by taking such relationships into account. Of interest is then the idea of university deriving from a situation in which many events and processes exist simultaneously, but not necessarily dependently, and in that also multiple interpretations may occur in contradictory and complementary ways. Re-thinking the idea of university and scholarly life thus means to critically examine these different forms of knowledge.
According to the second hypothesis, despite the disciplinary borders, the central forms of knowledge in the Humanities show many similarities to those in the practical fields of education. Not only formal logics and learning strategies are related to each other, also aisthesis as a form of understanding art and the pedagogical tact are connatural. One could find many other examples.

In the decision for globalization, interculturality and interdependence, diversity and gender, humanism and democracy and art, visual culture and media as the outstanding fields of challenge we already chose certain perspectives on Bildung and cultural values. Our joint concern hereby is to listen to the various complementary or conflicting claims of reality of different epistemic communities proposing ideas about challenges arising in these fields. Today we live in a space of intense proximity; the economic, ecologic and human interdependence of the diverse nations and cultures becomes more and more obvious. In future fast and profound changes and new chances are expected. A sustainable way of dealing with these challenges presupposes intercultural and ecological thinking, characterized by openness and flexibility and by the knowledge about the entanglements and the interdependences of diverse values, cultures and species transcending the national borders and continents. In a pedagogical sense, the knowledge to be learnt is always related to the ability of connecting and applying it to challenges at hand, sustainably caring for oneself, for others and for the environment in the wide sense.

Today, the idea of scientifically valid representation taking a reflexive place outside of the real by referring to the abstraction of a European masculine being as the template for conceptualizing the individual is confronted by a research on people’s knowledge in a world of cultural diversity and diverse forms of self-representation. Feminist approaches regard a social context as formed by performative references to subjectivity and generality. They deal with the question of how objectivity is constructed, reasoned and fixed. In our forum we will deal with the concepts of diversity, gender and education and critique against norms that operate in education and society.

Cultural performance is always performance of a community in handling and interpretation of verbalized and non-verbalized significant characters. It comes into effect in the medium of the physically expressive, namely, when symbols and their sensual presence appear together. Cultural meanings would become evident in the enforcement character of (social and other) events and actions. The question is how values, agency and critical thinking of individuals can be emphasized, individually and collectively, without overstressing rationalism, naturalism and empiricism or faith.

Not only education, also art is about relation rather than outcome. Art is about meeting and interpreting; and it can be a way to investigate the world and put things at stake. Contemporary art, academic research and education are successively converging as ways of searching for knowledge, and all can function as methods to broaden the mind. The artes liberales are considered essential for a
person in order to know how to take an active and responsible part in civic life; new social and public media unfold own dynamics that enforce or hinder from such participation.

The principal purpose of this conference is thus to investigate various cultural archives and learning – formal and informal, analogical and digital etc. – in order to map multiple, simultaneous, and concurring claims of reality, experience, and meaning that form an idea of university. Important are also methodological and theoretical foundations for empirical studies that seek to map the different concepts of university. A particular value is attached to aesthetic approaches.

References:


Institut fuer Raumexperimente: http://raumexperimente.net/en/