Exploring Competences

The Difference between the Implicit, the Performative, the Mimetic and the Corporeal Dimensions of Pedagogy – and the Implications for Sustainability in Pedagogy

Present day pedagogy refers to a kind of theoretical and empirical research which problematizes the concept of “objectivity”, and investigates the principle of consensus. Here, social reality is dealt with as if it were a text (cp. “linguistic turn”). That is to say, social reality is seen as if it were ruled by completeness, closeness, unambiguity and linearity (Oser 1997, Wulf 2007). Analogously, in school it is widely regarded as the main aim to impart available knowledge and abilities oriented at certain objectives. Pedagogical theory and practice is often reduced to certain norms and to definite interventions in well-defined pedagogical situations. In this regard, pedagogy as well as pedagogically intended knowledge and abilities are interpreted as psychometric competences.

By focusing mainly the tacit side of practices, we follow up a paradigm shift in pedagogy.

This paradigm shift entails not only a revision of instructional practices but also a revision of the existing theoretical approaches to educational practices and learning. Also the learning goals and the means of instruction have to be revised.

At our symposium the question is discussed what turn-taking in pedagogy means, causes, effects and implicates. Maud Hietzge works out potentials for getting sight of the forgotten, hidden or tabooed dimensions of corporality in pedagogy. Joris Vlieghe uses this turn in pedagogy for the rehabilitation of exercising. Bosse Bergstedt’s, Anna Herbert’s and Bernd Hackl’s & Barbara Enko’s statements are critically rereading postmodern turn-takings by referring to the benchmarks that are set up by the diverse processes of globalization, capitalization and imperialism. Here, also the question arises what kinds of turns accompany the tacit turn (material turn etc.). My own contribution deals with the question what is a tacit turn in pedagogy and which discourses may it refer to. Eva Schwarz elaborates some of these aspects by means of an empirical study.

On one hand, today´s pedagogy is ruled by the perspective of caring for the child and for its future in society and the normative framing by personal, social and political-
economical demands. On the other hand, pedagogy today is led by a high esteem for the personality, the responsibility and also the autonomy of the child. Both approaches are deeply rooted in the tradition of Enlightenment (cf. Adorno 1947). This means that social reality is regarded as being governed by planning and by sensible decisions, by rules, by transparent procedures, by unambiguous facts and by other characteristics of rational order. If this is not the case in reality, pedagogy (and with it each child and each pedagogue) is usually addressed as one of the first to change the situation for the better. Anyway, pedagogy usually fails. The idea of sustainable development is one of these outstanding political aims that are transferred to pedagogy.

In my presentation I will stick to scientific models in which pedagogy is seen differently from this tradition.

In the beginning of the 1970ies emancipatory and rationalistic concepts were at their peak of success in politics and pedagogy. However, in 1979, Francois Lyotard proclaimed the “end of master narratives”, such as “emancipation”, “autonomy”, “societal progress” etc. The postmodern movement stressed the self-interpretation, the contingency, the discoursivity and the stage-character of phenomena and worked this out for the different fields of human and even for not human existence. This paradigm shift was mostly carried out by referring to the materiality of the body, of experience, of history and to the interdependencies between the diverse species. Hereby, new fields of social research have been opened up.

In my presentation I will sketch three approaches in which pre-reflexive and not easily graspable aspects of pedagogy are put in the foreground, such are e.g. iconic, creative, poetic, power-related and material aspects. In these approaches, I quote Gebauer & Wulf 1995: 10, the shared “[…] position is critical of rationality, however, without surrendering the claim of reason to the irrational”. These are first the concept of implicit or tacit knowledge (Polanyi, Neuweg, Mayr et al.), second, anthropological approaches describing human existence by terms like performativity and mimesis (Wulf, Zirfas, Tervooren et al.), and third, the body-phenomenological approach (Merleau-Ponty, Waldenfels, Meyer-Drawe et al.).

My hypothesis is that these three different theoretical frameworks for empirical research in pedagogy can be regarded as affirming the postmodern paradigm shift. Thus, we can speak here of a tacit turn in educational sciences. From an empirical view, this turn leads to a micro-analytic analysis of practices. Then, sustainability is ciphered out as an implicit as well as an explicit meaning of acting and it has performative and bodily aspects. Not anymore working as a general principle of judging, sustainability gets reduced to practical meanings – as a never forgettable experience, a radical insight or as behaviour that is indicated in ecological regards etc.

Implicit or tacit knowledge (Polanyi, Neuweg, Mayr et al.): “Implicit learning” is the psychological concept of non-episodic, incidental learning that goes along with the unawareness of what has been learnt. For implicit learning not
a focal, but a “tacit”, that is to say more complex visual, sequential and as well functional attention is supposed to be required. In different stimulus structures implicit learning shows biases, dissociations and complexity not being reduced to linear, definite, unquestionable arguments, as focal or explicit learning usually is. One regards implicit learning as based on distinct memory mechanisms (- the dependence of implicit learning on particular brain areas is discussed). The result of implicit learning, implicit knowledge is supposed not to be articulable in formal and systematic language, in scientific formulae, specifications, and so forth. It is thought as being abstract and represented mostly in practice.

The classification of implicit (tacit) as well as of explicit (focal) knowledge can be criticized insofar as it is dependent on the relativity of language. Just think of the fact that a certain language allows for formulations which are implicit in other languages (cp. The 1000 expressions for “white” in Eskimo. Besides, a linguist is able to formulate the grammar that governs our linguistic performance, whereas this might be difficult for other people. In general, the language of specialists permits finer discriminations than ordinary language.

Taking this critique into account, one can say that “implicit” and “tacit” should not be dealt with as something or somewhat, as e.g. memory or knowledge, but as a way how something is dealt with. The “act-notion” of tacit/implicit involves the capacity to mobilize experiences, beliefs and values in action as well as the operational side of power relations etc. To deepen this interpretation I will keep up with an anthropological and then with the body-phenomenological approach to learning.

**Performativity and mimesis (Wulf, Zirfas et al.)**

The term performativity denotes the capacity of speech and language in particular, as well as of other non-verbal forms of expressive action. Hereby, the capacity to perform a certain type of being is signified. In contrast to the logic of representation, input/output and empirical facts the dynamic relations and processes are in the focus, which are supposed to determine, produce and validate objects. Here in particular the body has become privileged as the site and as the medium of practices. Performativity creates a forum, a ritual, a social action beyond the constraints of a system or structure. Performative acts produce what they signify by making a person unfold also such abilities which were not available to her/him before. This corresponds to the concept of learning as mimesis. Mimesis carries a wide range of meanings, which include the act of resembling and the imitation, the act of expression and representation, mimicry, receptivity, nonsensuous similarity as well as the presentation of the self. Mimesis is an embodied a non-repressive and non-violent form of reason, the repetitive character of which includes moments of alteration, that is to say learning.

The critique of the concept of performativity deals with the idea of a permanent identity revolution and mimikry\(^1\), though social relations might not be that fluid and

\(^1\) **WULF & ZIRFAS 2007, 30**
formable. As well one may miss unconscious or ethical-philosophical meaningfulness and multileveled complexity of phenomena that cannot be described as emergence or as visible interdependencies. Further, there is no measure to decide on the prevalence of certain attitudes. In body-phenomenology the moment of arbitrariness is reduced to the limits of human perception.

**Corporeality and Bodyliness (Merleau-Ponty, Waldenfels, Meyer-Drawe et al.):**

According to Maurice Merleau-Ponty phenomena come up as sensual impressions, not-articulable perceptions, subliminal thoughts and as the origin of speaking in silence.\(^2\) As our body is our “natural I and as such the subject of perception”\(^3\), we do not have a consciousness about our living body, as we do not have any distance to it. Thus, it is a “point zero” as the bodily orientation in an individual or situational field of seeing, acting or speaking.\(^4\) At “point zero” (where we always already are) we become (tacitly) aware of the determining factors of the constitution of a phenomenon. Meyer-Drawe (2008) locates the experience of learning there. Learning is thus a tacit phenomenon, it is an occurrence, whereas its beginning and its process is never evident in the sense of being definable. In learning former knowledge is to be rejected and new features enter familiar contexts. So to say, estrangement is like a fissure inside the learning subject; it is an inner estrangement that enables us to respond to things we do not yet know. We thus do not exclusively gain knowledge, insight and understanding in an active way. Like every human experience learning involves multiple disruptions, chiasms, fissures, distances. Anyway, after we have learnt something, then, for a sudden, things are making sense in a kind of archaic and persistent way, as if this sense had been there forever.

Phenomenology is sometimes criticized for being obscurant as the understanding of social acts is bound to subjective, *lived* experience. The phenomenological observer attempts to acquire the knowledge of the categories and rules of thinking and acting as a native, thus carrying out research in the emic\(^5\) mode. Hereby, s/he is free to use extraneous categories and rules, also derived from the data language of science. There is no awareness of the fact that “[…] a change in the perceived meaning or purpose entails a change in the action that is perceived.” (Wilson, 1970: 67) Besides that, phenomenologists tend to dismiss etic truths - as poverty, ruling classes, imperialist or capitalist systems etc. and processes such as evolution, adaptation and exploitation – regarding them as “reifications”. Some of these truths are beyond subjective intelligibility and/or observers happen to believe in them. Thereby, phenomenology dismisses critical options and also possibilities of a pedagogically indicated emancipation.

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\(^2\) Merleau-Ponty 1967, 50
\(^3\) Merleau-Ponty 1966, 243
\(^4\) Waldenfels 1998, 22
\(^5\) An “emic” account is a description of behavior or a belief in terms meaningful (consciously or unconsciously) to the actor; that is, an emic account comes from a person within the culture. Almost anything from within a culture can provide an emic account.

An “etic” account is a description of a behavior or belief by an observer, in terms that can be applied to other cultures; that is, an etic account attempts to be “culturally neutral.”
My proposal is to work on the question how to get the idea of emancipation into the research on the tacit dimensions of pedagogy.

Sources:


