

The Moral Responsibility of Pedagogy in Dealing with Power

Barbara Drinck

Educational institutions are unfortunately always suspected of putting their subjects under a crude authority. They can end up in a physical or mental exploitative relationship, which hardly anyone - not even knowing outsiders - can resist. The "pedagogical reference" intended by Herman Nohl can lead to an asymmetry of power and thus expose children and young people in need of care to unsuitable abusive "pedagogues".

In what the author calls evil triangulated institutions, which work with power as educational strategies and leader cult, which uphold cover ideologies, something that Ervin Goffman called a "total institution" in his book "Asyle" from 1961 emerges. The essay deals with the dark sides of educational institutions.

We already know the good and the sunny sides of pedagogy very well through many wonderful concepts such as those of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Maria Montessori, Makiguchi Tsunesaburō, John Dewey and Alexander Sutherland Neill. We also know concepts of non-violent education like those of Dane Jasper Juuls or Thomas Gordon. They are exemplary and desirable. However, one must in fact also deal with the sides that were aptly described by Paul Watzlawick as the "bad in the good" - or by C.G. Jung as "enantiodromia": as the emergence of the opposite of the initially ideal intention.

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1. Violence as a Normal Condition in Pedagogical Institutions

What if *brute force* and *abuse* by educators in pedagogical institutions had reached a normality that is no longer observed by anyone, that is not only commonplace but perhaps also pedagogically legitimate?

The film “*Freistatt*” by Marc Brummund from the year 2015 describes such conditions in 1968. While emancipation, the right to freedom, and turning away from authority were propagated in the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany), in the Protestant welfare institution “*Diakonie Freistatt*” in Lower Saxony (FRG), the unimaginable abuse of violence against children continued for years. It is only recently that the matter has been dealt with.¹ Before that, the violence and abuse there were kept silent. Life in the 1950s-1970s in the *Diakonieheim* is reminiscent of reports from concentration camps. Draconian punishments were carried out: corporal punishment, starvation, as well as punitive bunkers and even mock executions – and all this under the eyes of the Protestant Church.

When we deal with such cruel behavior toward those under protection, we will feel an unbearable feeling, an indignation will rise and a vehement defense will be put into place because it is unimaginably difficult to even think about what a revolting world could have allowed this to happen.

There is hardly anything else to report from the past of the GDR (German Democratic Republic): From 1949 to 1990, 495.000 children and young people between six and 18 years of age passed through the GDR’s children’s home system. There was a total of 662 homes, 456 of which were so-called normal children’s homes with 21,259 places, 168 special children’s homes with 9,364 places and 38 youth work yards (*Jugendwerkhöfe*), in which a total of 3,031 young people could be accommodated.² The special

homes were the most brutal of these. Their inmates were completely isolated from their environment. The most brutal of the special homes was the *Jugendwerkhof Torgau*, de facto a prison for children and young people.³ Ingolf Notzke, scientific speaker of the *Torgau Youth Work Yard Memorial*, said on *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*: “Torgau was (a) ... measure of the GDR youth welfare service that deprived the youth of their freedom.”⁴ It represented the “system of education through punishment.”⁵ (See also: *Coming to Terms with Home Education in the GDR 2012*⁶).

Brute force and abuse in educational institutions by educators were the norm in both parts of Germany then and they are still a reality today, although not always in this openly brutal form.

2. What Does Violence Allow - Educational Irritations

The ideology behind the unscrupulous mistreatment of those under protection – Jürgen Oelkers aptly calls it “cover ideology”⁷ – is a worldview that claims to always have the *right* solution for social problems with young people.⁸ This solution legitimizes the subjugating treatment of the weaker in the sense of a perverted view of education: punishments for the smallest deviations and rewards if the (ideological) rules are followed. Therefore, it is always an ideology that justifies violence. And defending violence almost automatically entails the abuse of the orders to protect.

How does such a cover ideology come about? In the winter semester of 1995/96, I experienced Hartmut von Hentig as a speaker at the Free University of Berlin: an elderly gentleman, elegantly and distinctively dressed, who rejected any proximity to science right at the beginning of his lecture. “I am an emeritus who no longer works scientifically,”⁹ he introduced his lecture. He then presented a somewhat strange-looking outline.¹⁰ After about forty-five minutes, he became more concrete: “Did 'The Man as Teacher' first become 'The Man as Educator', now this 'The Young Man as Educator and Lover' became more precise 'an educator through a love relationship'”.¹¹ A few minutes later: “I cannot do justice to the subject of boy love in this context – if anyone can. The important reason for me is that it is a specific form of comprehensive personal human education and leadership in adolescence – and we must approach this again if pedagogy is to have any effect at all in a world ... of cultivated indifference (and) a young generation thrown back on itself ...”.¹² I could not understand why a frenetic applause

followed. It is good that you can still read this lecture, because it was printed in “The Man” Paragrana Volume 6 (1997) (2).

Jürgen Oelkers reports about a similar experience¹³: “... on the 26th of January 2010, Hartmut von Hentig gave a public lecture in the white hall of the New Castle in Stuttgart.¹⁴ Honorary listeners were invited. At the end of the lecture the audience reacted “almost enthusiastically and with long lasting applause. ... Nobody seems to have been bothered by the fact that ... the love for the child is supposed to be shaped by the ‘educational Eros’ ...”¹⁵ A short time later, on the 6th of March 2010, the “notorious pederast and child molester”¹⁶, Gerold Becker, director of the reformed pedagogical *Landerziehungsheim Odenwaldschule* from 1972 to 1985, was unmasked. Hartmut von Hentig was closely associated with him for almost 50 years, but claimed to have known nothing. Nevertheless, he helped Becker to a “steep career as an education expert and school reformer”¹⁷ and tried to normalize his deeds ideologically with the ‘pedagogical Eros’.

3. Pedagogical Misconduct

For this essay I got a thoroughly yellowed book titled “Eros” from the year 1921 by Gustav Wyneken from the antiquarian bookstore because in the course of the preparations, I remembered something from the reports of my father, who died in 2018. He had written a book about Wyneken’s pedagogy in 1963 (at that time I had just started school) (titled “The Thoughts of Youth with Gustav Wyneken” E.E. Geißler). In “Eros,” ideas about the education of the youth are written down, which correspond with the few quotes from von Hentig that I quoted. My reading had to be done – against all emotional resistance – with detective objectivity. And indeed, I found a plea for ‘pedagogical Eros’ on every one of the 70 pages. The beginnings of all pedagogical classics – from Rousseau to Salzmann to Herbart – show one thing: The first paragraph outlines the program of the entire text. Wyneken also follows this rhetorical tactic. We can read the following here, which is then repeated continuously until the end of the book and is supported by various arguments: “*Paidierastia* – I choose the Greek word because there is no equivalent in German, because *Paidierastia* is about as different from ‘pederasty’ as the *Gymnasion* is from the Gymnasium (secondary school) – means love for boys, Eros directed at boys. So that is again not the same as what is called same-sex love today. It is not just an arbitrary erotic addiction

of one male to another, but the erotic attachment of a man to a boy or a young man, and, let us add this right away: an erotic attachment of these boys and young men to a man.”¹⁸ Boy love as a comprehensive personal education and guidance of people, as Hentig explained, is therefore already propagated by Wyneken.

Wyneken, after he had been charged with lewd acts with his under-age students and pupils and had been brought to court for his offences against § 174 of the Penal Code for the German Reich of 1871¹⁹, wanted to use the writing “Eros” to defend his deeds. His defense, which was self-centered and inconsiderate towards children – incomprehensible to us today – even found advocates! Jürgen Oelkers would report on this in 2012 in his essay “‘Pädagogischer Eros’ in deutschen Landerziehungsheimen”²⁰ (‘Pedagogical Eros’ in German Country Boarding School). Oelkers himself is a vehement opponent of a normalization of “love relationships between educators and pupils” and denounces this abuse of children under protection, which has become a matter of course, especially since sexual assault by teachers in *Landerziehungsheimen* (country boarding schools) often occurred. Gustav Wyneken was not an isolated incident. Not only the perpetrators, but also the silent confidants and supporters are guilty of the crimes. Something that also applied to the *Odenwaldschule*: The knowledgeable teachers who kept silent, but also the authorities who looked away and above all the unfit parents who believed the abusers more than their own children in need, we find all these evildoers already at the beginning of the 20th century.

Oelkers found it difficult to understand the indignation of Wyneken’s faithful admirers, who after all entrusted their children to his care, who regarded the trial against him for sexual abuse of his protégés as a scandal and wanted to acquit him of all wrongdoing: “Even more conspicuous, however, is the behavior of Wyneken’s followers, who not only denied guilt, but saw no crime at all despite the evidence. It was appeased and played down, the victims were presented as untrustworthy and Wyneken was seen as a great educator and symbol of free education, who could not have done what was obvious.”²¹

4. Authority and Obedience

How can it come to abuse when so many, who do not agree with it at all know about it, even experience it firsthand, could intervene? They do not

do it; they remain silent and thus cover up these acts. We find an answer – for the case of Wyneken – in an essay written by Caroline Jahr in 2002²²: “The problem with Wyneken’s concept of leadership is this: In principle, leadership in education acts as an all-embracing personal relationship between the leader and the youth who voluntarily follow him, which is not limited to moral influence and the imparting of skills. There is also the possibility that the leader will eventually elevate himself to the principle of truth. Then the children and young people entrusted to him would be urged to follow him unconditionally and accustomed to submit to the authority of the leader. The leader and his followers would thus become commander and obeyers.”²³ Wyneken's principle of leadership is not about the organizational management of the school or the education and moral guidance of the children. Rather, leadership in his sense is “a relationship of dependency based on an ideology, which is absolutely valid and is not designed to dissolve one day.”²⁴

Educational leadership, as it was and is practiced in some closed boarding schools, is therefore in fact pure command and obedience. The perfidy of sexual abuse in educational institutions is the fact that children are made dependent on the false friendly approach or on gifts from the educator, and in return are subjected to sexual acts, also because they fear that in case of resistance violence will be used or the perpetrator will try to explore the emotional weaknesses of the child in order to enforce his desires with power. The traumatizing consequence of this is that the abuser succeeds by the child *voluntarily* participating. Children thus often have ambivalent feelings towards the perpetrators. They cannot recognize the exploitation of their dependent situation.

Meike Sophia Baader argues differently from Oelkers in her essay “Blind Spots in the Debate on Sexualized Violence” from 2012²⁵: She writes that it is not individual perpetrators who commit these crimes, but that such abusive behavior can only become possible through the power mechanisms implemented in the institutions in the first place. She recognizes the subtle interplay of “techniques of domination” and “pedagogical Eros”²⁶ in the country boarding school as a general, since structural, danger of closed institutions.

5. The Relationship Between Education - Power - Violence - Sexuality

In his essay “Ambivalenzen in der Neuen Erziehung” (Ambivalences in New Education) Manfred Kappeler, unlike Jürgen Oelkers, tries to save the idea of reform education and to distinguish it from the individual pedophilic excesses of educators. One must clarify the documented connections, he writes. This can only be done by analyzing the relationships between education - power - violence - sexuality, as called for in the statement of the DGfE (German Society for Educational Science) on the discussion of sexual violence in educational contexts and on coming to terms with sexual child abuse.²⁷ This debate (about sexual violence in educational institutions) can by no means be considered closed to date. It was rekindled last year with the publication of the third volume of the autobiography of the aforementioned educationalist Hartmut von Hentig “Noch immer mein Leben. Erinnerungen und Kommentare aus den Jahren 2005 bis 2015“ (Still my Life. Memories and Comments from 2005 to 2015) (Berlin: Wamiki 2016).

Immediately after publication, critical voices complained that von Hentig’s book justifies Gerold Becker’s criminal actions as well as his own, ignoring and denying the multiple abuse cases in the *Odenwaldschule*.

The idea of reform education was certainly a very honorable one: 1900 saw the beginning of a change in educational science and the reform educators wanted to exchange *education as a subject for education as a responsible citizen*. However, the reform educators themselves were far too deeply rooted in thinking about the necessity of leadership in education. In the educational ideology of leadership and male associations, the term “pedagogical reference” was also coined. In 1933, in “The Educational Movement in Germany and its Theory,” Herman Nohl defined the relationship between educators and pupils as *pedagogical reference*. According to Nohl, the basis of this education should be the passionate relationship between an adult man and an adolescent. This relationship of the educator to the child should be determined by the love for the child in order to encourage, guide and educate it. The characteristic of the pedagogical relationship is therefore an emotional bond between the older and younger person.

According to Nohl, the pedagogical reference has the following characteristics: 1. a maturity gap between educator and pupil, 2. the relationship is marked by passion and love, 3. unlike the relationship between parents and children, it should be temporary, and 4. it should protect

children and young people from negative influences and confront them with requirements in order to attain maturity and independence.

However, the idea of a power-violence divide can still be found in pedagogical references. Manfred Kappeler even speaks of a “denial of the asymmetry of power in the concept of the pedagogical reference”²⁸. “The power that acts as psychological violence through the ideologically charged ‘pedagogical reference’ in the ‘direct encounter from person to person’ cannot come into the self-reflective and self-critical view of the educator.”²⁹ Kappeler tries to decide who is to blame when some (few) educators abuse their power. Is it the sole responsibility of the perpetrators or is the blame or the cause to be found in the conception of the educational institution? Should sexual violence remain exclusively a perpetrator-victim matter? Or is it not rather the degree of isolation or the lack of transparency in educational institutions that is responsible for the abuse of power?

The answers could be as follows: From a socio-psychological point of view there are dynamics that have less to do with the pedagogical concepts than with *three bad conditions*: 1. total social isolation, 2. absolute ranking and hierarchy within the institution and 3. the silence of the participants and those who know about it. Certainly, one finds similar things in the natural family: isolation from the outside world, strict, mostly patriarchal hierarchies and silence. In the educational institutions, as well as in the families, this *bad triangulation* is devastating.

The famous Stanford Prison Experiment from 1971 by Philip Zimbardo can contribute to a complementary answer. The experiment was about investigating what happens when normal people are moved to an evil place that has the three evil conditions already mentioned. The result of the experiment as well as the real world is: Whoever has the power uses or even abuses it! Whoever gets into an inferior position will (have to) submit. It seems to be rather the order of precedence: the position of power or the role of the subject – as a personality trait – which leads one to abuse inferior people or to let oneself be taken over by superior people.³⁰ Anyone can get into this situation.³¹ It is a mundane fact. I.e., to be evil, it is not necessary to have experienced evil itself.

In 1961 the US-American psychologist Stanley Milgram shocked the world with another experiment: Under pressure from the head of the study, his subjects were ordered to give electric shocks to a stranger as a punishment

if he solved (nonsensical) tasks incorrectly. They did it – even to the point of a fatal electric shock. Why? Because they had not learned to contradict authority. Because our “willingness to make others suffer when an authority tells us to... is great.”³²

Today, the experiment might not yield such clear results. I hope we have been well immunized against false authorities. Surely this should be the result of democratic education, especially in schools, which, in the tradition of the Adorno Circle’s research on authoritarianism³³, should have developed more and more intellectual antibodies over the last decades! Nevertheless, in the event of a social change towards renewed authority, such behavior would certainly be more widespread again.

6. The Total Institution

It should be reconsidered and examined how a mere cult of leadership in educational institutions implies the danger of subjugating others. The cult of the leader becomes (by its banal fact) a relationship of mental exploitation to which hardly anyone offers resistance. The pedagogical reference with its asymmetrical concept of power brings together children and young people in need of attention and pedosexually-active pedagogues. “This isolation from the family, from the milieu of origin and from all possible external relationships is an essential aspect of unity, within which the power of the educator, which is inherent in every educational relationship, can turn into the sheer exercise of violence.”³⁴ In *badly triangulated* institutions, which work with power as educational strategies, and leader cult, which upholds cover ideologies, something is created that Ervin Goffman calls a “total institution” in his book “Asyle” from 1961. Although institutions are social and moral pillars, as Arnold Gehlen demonstrates in “Urmensch und Spätkultur” (Prehistoric Man and Late Culture) from 1956, they can also become a system of oppression for individuals. Gehlen writes about the dependence of human beings on institutions such as the state, family and law, and even speaks of a need for institutions in the anthropological sense, but it must always be critically analyzed whether this basic need can become a trap, namely when one can no longer escape from a totalitarian institution. But there is also a danger in the institutions, Goffman points out. They can turn into totalitarian structures, then – as I would like to add – if they isolate, hierarchize and prohibit speech (i.e. one must not speak about the truth of

what has been experienced). What “totalitarian institutions” have in common is that the behavior of the subjects falls into typical patterns: 1. primary or loyal adaptation and 2. secondary adaptations, consisting of, for instance, conversion or colonization.

Primary adaptation takes place in the privilege system of the institution. It is a rule-compliant way of organizing one’s self: Rewards can be hoped for cooperation (but “rewards” are self-evident things that everyone outside the institution can easily get, like food, clothes, sleep, rest, some muse...) and (draconian) punishments threaten if the rules are not followed.

Secondary adaptation aims at preserving the self-damaged by the restriction, through whatever means necessary. These are subversive strategies of self-assertion, of role distance: for example, through colonization, i.e., the use of the means available even in the limitation of the institution. One adapts to the circumstances of the institution. In the conversion process, the inmate internalizes the official judgment about himself and plays the role of a perfect inmate.

Power mechanisms also work here by isolating people in an area that is closed off to the outside, whereby every transfer within and to the outside is controlled. Furthermore, the hierarchical system also provides for a fixed social order of precedence, which no one is allowed to circumvent. Especially the separation of gender and generation leads to an absolute control of interactions.

7. Reconditioning

Of course, we can see a clear democratization in the educational institutions today. That is why the injustices committed against children and young people in educational establishments are gradually being dealt with. The Catholic Church has been trying to clear up and come to terms with these cases since 2010 at the latest, when a large number of cases of abuse in its German institutions became known.

On the 25th of September 2018, a study was published that documents the cases of abuse between 1946 and 2014.³⁵ The Archdiocese of Cologne has also commissioned its own independent abuse study, which even names those responsible. But the publication was postponed at short notice for legal reasons and is still pending.

8. Conclusion

As we have seen, professional pedagogy is always under the latent suspicion of not only helping in but possibly resorting to violence against children. Due to incidents in closed boarding schools and in transparently-organized schools and youth clubs by problematic pedagogues or by certain concepts defending pedophilia, pedagogy is no longer harmless.

We have seen what difficulties arise when one wants to analyze abuse and violence both in educational institutions and in schools. I was far from able to mention all aspects. For example, I could not talk about the shame of the victims. We also could not talk about the consequences, which can include severe psychological and mostly life-long impairments that throw the life of the victims off track. We also explored little about the motives of the perpetrators, or about all the conditions that create institutions so that power corrupts there. Nevertheless, I was able to report that an ideology that wanted to make “Pedagogical Eros” socially acceptable could also lead to the objective view of abuse being lost from view.

All in all, it is a complex conglomerate of negative causes that leads to such serious criminal offences as brute force and sexual abuse. The moral responsibility of pedagogy is therefore to analyze the whole complex system and to build in protective walls with which the worst can at least be prevented. However, to do this, it is also necessary to strengthen the courageous attitude of educators and to sharpen their professionalism on the subject at hand. They must be able to clearly identify the pitfalls that are opening up for children and young people in the institutions.

Education must, of course, take responsibility, it must develop preventive measures much more clearly than before, so that institutions, authorities, counseling centers and families – and there also those potentially affected – are equipped against criminal border crossings, brutal assaults and cover-ups. We must be prepared for the fact that there will always be a large silent mass of people who refuse and are unwilling to make any statement about the incidents of which they are very well aware.

I hope that everyone is prepared to educate themselves here and to take committed action against abuse and violence in educational establishments.

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Notes

- 1 See the results of a two-year research project: Matthias Benad, Hans-Walter Schmuhl, Kerstin Stockhecke (eds.): „Endstation Freistatt – Fürsorgeerziehung in den v. Bodelschwingschen Anstalten Bethel bis in die 1970er Jahre.“ 376 Pages with 26 b/w illustrations. Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2011
- 2 from Deutschlandfunk: https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/dossier-heimerziehung-in-derddr.2165.de.html?dram:article_id=426607 2017
- 3 See: MDR-Film Worse than prison - The closed youth work yard Torgau of 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Os7cwGYbrIY>

- 4 MDR film from 2016: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1m0SG_VXpUs
- 5 In: https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/dossier-heimerziehung-in-der-ddr.2165.de.html?dram:article_id=426607 2017
- 6 https://www.thueringen.de/imperia/md/content/tmsfg/abteilung3/referat31/expertisen_aufarbeitung_der_heimerziehung_in_der_ddr.pdf
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- 8 See Federal Agency for Civic Education: <https://www.bpb.de/nachschlagen/lexika/das-junge-politiklexikon/161222/ideologie>
- 9 Hartmut von Hentig: „Und dem Mentor glich sie ganz an Stimme und Aussehen“ Nachdenkliches über die männliche Absicht in der Pädagogik. In: Dieter Lenzen und Gert Mattenklott: Der Mann. Paragrana Band 6, Heft 2, 1997, p. 73-94
- 10 von Hentig 1997, p. 76
- 11 von Hentig 1997, p. 87
- 12 von Hentig 1997, p. 88
- 13 Jürgen Oelkers: Lecture at the University of Education St. Gallen on 02-27-2012 – <https://www.ife.uzh.ch/dam/jcr:00000000-4a53-efcc-ffff-ffffe9c0f25/St.GallenEros.pdf>
- 14 Ibidem, p. 3
- 15 Ibidem, p. 4
- 16 Ibidem, p. 5
- 17 Ibidem, p. 5
- 18 Gustav Wyneken: Eros. Lauenburg/Elbe 1921, p. 3
- 19 Penal Code for the German Reich 1871 Announcement 14 June 1871, § 174.
Penalty of up to five years in prison:
xix Guardians who commit lewd acts with their foster parents, adoptive and foster parents, with their children, clergymen, teachers and educators, with their under-age pupils or pupils who are minors;
xx Officials who commit lewd acts with persons against whom they have to conduct an investigation or who are entrusted to their care;
xxi Officials, doctors or other medical personnel employed or engaged in prisons or public institutions intended for the care of the sick, poor or other helpless, when they commit lewd acts with persons admitted to the prison or institution.
If there are extenuating circumstances, the prison sentence shall not be less than six months.
- 20 Oelkers 2012 – a, p. 27-44
- 21 Oelkers 2012 – a, p. 29
- 22 https://wynekens.de/Misc/gustav_wyneken.pdf at the University of Rostock
- 23 Jahr 2002, p. 32
- 24 Ibidem
- 25 Meike Sophia Baader: Blinde Flecken in der Debatte über sexualisierte Gewalt. In: Werner Thole u.a. (Ed.): Sexualisierte Gewalt, Macht und Pädagogik. Opladen u.a. 2012, p. 84-99
- 26 Baader 2012, p. 86
- 27 https://www.dgfe.de/fileadmin/OrdnerRedakteure/Stellungnahmen/2017.03_Sexuelle_Gewalt_in_paedagogischen_Kontexte.n.pdf, also in: Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft 2017 Heft 54 p. 97/8
- 28 Manfred Kappeler: Ambivalenzen in der „Neuen Erziehung“. In: In: Werner Thole u.a.

- (Hrsg.): Sexualisierte Gewalt, Macht und Pädagogik. Opladen u.a. 2012, p. 58-83, S. 80
- 29 Kappeler 2012, p. 81
- 30 See Stanford Prison Experiment <https://www.prisonexp.org/german/slide1g.htm>
- 31 See Milgram-Experiment. Empfehlenswert der Film Experimentier - Die Stanley Milgram Story von Michael Almereyda Experimentier - Die Stanley Milgram Story aus dem Jahr 2015.
- 32 Dieter E. Zimmer: Das Unbehagen an der Autorität. 1981, p. 201. Text printed: <http://www.d-ezimmer.de/HTML/autoritaet1981.htm>
- 33 Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson, R. Nevitt Sanford: Die autoritäre Persönlichkeit. Frankfurt a. M. 1973
- 34 Manfred Kappeler: Ambivalenzen in der „Neuen Erziehung“ 2012, In: Werner Thole u.a. (Hrsg.): Sexualisierte Gewalt, Macht und Pädagogik. Opladen u.a. 2012, p. 58-83, S. 71
- 35 https://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/dossiers_2018/MHG-Studie-gesamt.pdf