

Wholeness and Pride: Building Blocks of a Humanitarian Education

Barbara Drinck

1.

After intensive exposure to one of the educational programmes while researching the reasons why the former GDR's educational goals of developing a *socialist personality* failed, I became very disenchanted. A government-imposed educational programme aiming to develop a politico-ideological personality is always bound to fail. This educational objective cannot be achieved even though a gigantic educational apparatus—ranging from crèche to university—is strongly engaged in achieving it! (Drinck 2009).

Why is that the case? The notion of the feasibility of ideals does not function through the means of education in a large scale style. This fact definitely is to be considered as favourable, because it shows that indoctrination programmes run by the state are not as effective as some politically problematic figures would like them to be.

Correspondingly, the education focusing on developing a *democratic personality* will also be less successful than hoped for if it is to be affected through educational institutions. I remember reading various highly recommended texts on the topic of “Learning Democracy” which assign school the task of conveying a *democratic habitus* (Edelstein 2007); courageous texts creating hope that children and adolescents will acquire a *democratic decision-making competence* if they experience a democratic way of life in school; and dedicated texts assuming that pupils will become better people overall if they are enabled to learn democratic practices for life.

I do believe, however, that these perspectives overestimate the

institution of school.

The desire to impart an intended, planned habitus through the means of educational institutions should always be considered problematic. Consequently, the system would need to become intolerant towards dissidents.

In the GDR, the state was the most powerful educational authority, as set down in the Youth Law of 1974. Parents' rights on educational decisions were strongly restricted. In the FRG, however, parents are considered as their children's natural legal guardians. This fact was established in the German Civil Law Code (*GG*, Article 6). Democracy leaves the educational authority to the parents, whereas undemocratic states restrict the parents' rights to decide about the education of their children. However, it must be considered very critically whether an additional educational requirement should now be placed (again) with the state institution school even when taking into consideration the argument of schools thus conveying more democracy into society.

All parents raise their children differently. The product of these diverse parenting styles is variety, and variety constitutes an important precondition for democracy. As educators, however, we disagree on one point, especially those of us who are regularly confronted with the results of parents' educational mistakes. There are parents who can easily be trusted to be capable of good parenting but there are also many who abuse their authority. So in order to provide all children with equal opportunities, would it not be more successful to this end to convert school into an even more totalitarian educational institution than it actually is today and thereby to limit and balance the parents' possibly harmful influence?

A large-scale solution possesses some menacing aspects such as providing school with an increasingly more evident educational authority and progressively more educational legislation. For whatever reasons, these grand solutions are never considered as only temporary solutions but always as definitive and thus final ones. The solution mentioned above is not considered a first test, temporarily providing school with more educational authority. Rather, it is implemented immediately as a long-term resolution. And when an institution such as school is given more educational rights, this change results in parents slowly los-

ing their educational rights, thus causing them to lose interest in their duty and responsibility to educate their children. (Drinck 2009: 95–6).

Karl Popper, the witty Austro-British philosopher and empiricist, warned us of grand programmes (Popper 1971). Something good and sustainable could only be achieved by taking small steps. These small steps will have to be taken by individuals in their immediate milieu; small steps can be taken in families, in one's circle of friends, between teachers and pupils, and between colleagues. A really sustainable change can only be achieved in this way (Irzik 1985).

According to Popper, the taking of small steps, however, is far too shabby for idealists and self-appointed do-gooders. Hence, they have continually tried to find large-scale solutions which are supposed to solve all existing problems once and for all.

Akin to Karl Popper, I am an advocate of slow changes, small steps, and of individual decisions about one's own life and opinions. As a result, my argumentation does not deal with great educational concepts which are being addressed to powerful institutions. Instead, I intend to address human beings; the small, the personal, and the individual domain. I shall speak about the small components which can contribute to the social world's improvement on a daily and perhaps hardly noticeable basis.

2.

Recently, I read a very impressive essay called *The Injured Pride* by Peter Sloterdijk (2011). The feeling that makes us not want our own honour and reputation to be hurt, pride apparently is not the result of a collective education but an elementary emotion. Hence, it is innate and cannot be implanted into people. Resulting from a deep respect for and great satisfaction with one's own personality, pride is usually protected too little during a person's upbringing. In this process, pride is often destroyed. During the course of our lives, we tend to accept far too much because we lack both a sense of self-assertion and the courage to be rebellious (resistance and opposition).

The famous German author Adolph Baron Knigge wrote in his book *On Human Relations* in 1788: "I should like to consider pride as the noble quality of the soul, as a consciousness of true inner sublimity

and dignity, as a feeling of the inability to act disgracefully. Pride leads to grand and noble deeds. It serves as support for an individual when he has been abandoned. It rises above the fate of bad men and forces even the powerful villain to pay tribute to it in the form of admiration, which he will be forced to show the oppressed philosopher” (Knigge 2009: 88) Knigge’s book was published in exactly the same year as *Critique of Practical Reason* by Immanuel Kant, about whom I will speak later.

3.

Now, one might wonder why education does not preserve such a wonderful innate emotion as pride in its course. Why is it suppressed? This question touches fundamental educational conceptions that exist in our culture. There are two distinctly different concepts of how education is actually supposed to work. One retains the pride and the other suppresses and functionalises the emotion. Today, the latter is more popular than the first one.

First one needs to ask why education is necessary at all. It is continually discussed why the older generation’s intended, planned influence on the younger generation can be substantiated at all. Why is the older generation authorised to educate the younger one, yet this relation does not function the other way around?

The elders’ unbalanced exertion of influence is regarded as a necessary process of socialisation—in order to accept the social world, to fit *in*. With the purpose of personality development, examples and role models are supposedly needed for a possible identification. Theodor Adorno strongly criticises this assumption: “I hardly have to repeat how strongly I agree with the criticism of the concept of the role model. This word belongs to the very sphere of the *Jargon of Authenticity* which I have tried to attack in principle. [...] Today, one can only wonder about anyone’s justification to seize the power to decide about how others will be educated” (Adorno 1971: 106–7). However, educational anthropology refers to the human *neediness* of education. This assumption strongly draws on Kant: “Humans will only become humans through education. They are nothing but the result of their education.”

The long phase of human development and socialization serves as justification for the assumption of education neediness. The two dis-

tinctly different educational conceptions mentioned above become relevant when contemplating how education is to take place in this sensitive phase: on the one hand, humans are—according to John Locke—considered a *tabula rasa*, a clean slate, which *must* be inscribed (Rousseau 1971). Thus, educators are understood as the *sculptors* of humans: they mould and shape them.

Yet, we also talk about a different approach which attempts to preserve and develop the innate potential given to men. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the famous Genevan philosopher and writer of the 18th century, requires particular mention here. He attributes humans with an inherently designed development which enables children—if they are watched and guarded well—to mature to complete adults and become good human beings. Here, educators are seen as *gardeners* caring for and protecting their protégés.

In current notions about education, the metaphor of the sculptor is far more common than the one of the gardener. Frequently, the malleability of the children is more strongly taken into consideration than their need for being protected.

On many levels, our ideas of good upbringing and education still coincide with those valid in the times of Immanuel Kant. Following this pedagogy, education is experienced as a timeless mission always sustaining the same contents and educational goals: maintaining and improving the old and, ultimately, perfecting mankind. Striving for perfection is an important ideal of the Enlightenment. Emotions are considered as needing to be mastered and necessarily also to be suppressed. Pride has to be controlled and may only be permitted as the result and consequence of a successful performance. This is the sculptors' concept of education.

The metaphor of the gardener stands in contrast to the sculptor. In addition to Rousseau, the well-known Italian physician and educator Maria Montessori attributes to all beings the ability to absorb for their development exactly what they need from their surroundings. Accordingly, they are socialising themselves. In these surroundings, education is implemented as following the children's own internal blueprint. She writes, "The child is the builder of the man, and there is no one who has not been built by the child he once was. [...] The child

forms of its own accord the future human being by absorbing its environment.” (Montessori 1972: 13).

Critically, I have spoken of the notion of education *neediness* and referred especially to the postulate of education *necessity*. Yet we also have to ask whether it is *possible* at all to educate or at least whether it is possible to always reach the planned educational objectives, too. As the socialist personality’s example demonstrates, it seems to be desired of a state-intended education but, however, impossible according to experience. What does this imply for parenting?

This question also arises for Kant: “How can I cultivate freedom while employing compulsion?” (Kant, I., 1982: 20) Or stated differently: how can human beings be enabled to develop self-determination through the means of heteronomy? In the sculptor’s pedagogy, education is often linked to compulsion: it results in an unequal distribution of power between educators and students. In order to realise educational objectives in their pupils, the sculptors use educational means systematically. The pupils are not given this opportunity. They either have to endure the process, participate actively, and adapt; or if they refuse to accept this way, they will have to rebel, go into resistance, and escape.

Yet can maturity be reached by compulsion? According to Adorno, maturity is the ability of humans to act sensibly and autonomously (Adorno 1971: 133). Thus, people must be able to form their convictions and opinions unaided and independently. This stage of development, however, can only be reached without the use of compulsion.

Let us follow the assumption that compulsion will not lead to self-determination. In the 1970s, the topic was discussed exactly in this way. It was considered impossible to achieve positive developments by the means of educational compulsion. According to Ekkehard von Braunmühl (1975) and Heinrich Kupffer (1984), such an education is equivalent to *heteronomy*. Nobody should possess the right to educate, form, and otherwise steer other people in order to achieve accordance to one’s own belief. As Montessori states, it might be the parents’ task to accompany, support, and advise their children but definitely not to form them. Hence, education is understood as an act of power, violence, heteronomy, and submission:

“Education always implies a power relationship in which people are ruling over people and, as a general rule, a power relationship in which adults [...] are ruling over children and adolescents.” (Giesecke 1969): *Introduction to Pedagogy*. Quoted according to von Braunmühl (2006: 65)

Frequently, educational *neediness* is derived from a theory considering humans as biologically flawed creatures. In order to compensate for these flaws and also for the reason of pure physical survival, they need to develop intellectual abilities and to learn cultural techniques which they could only receive and pass on by the means of education.

4.

The sculptor’s education suppresses pride. Research has shown that children’s self-confidence diminishes continually in the period between their admission to school up until their graduation. For organisational reasons of teaching contents, school, however, cannot educate without the element of compulsion.

Now we are reaching a psychological perspective. What does it mean for individuals if their pride is being suppressed? In short, it means to live with insults permanently. Insults per se are an everyday experience. In our society with its strong beliefs in capability, human capital, vitality, flexibility, etc., it would be unrealistic to assume that we could pass through childhood, adolescence and adulthood without ever experiencing insults. Hence, humans also have to master the task of learning how to cope well with hurt feelings, i.e. developing a tolerance for frustration.

Psychoanalytical pedagogy (Richter 1962; Miller 1980) has considered the question of what an education would have to include for humans to learn how to cope with insults and simultaneously strengthen their egos, their self-confidence. This is an enormous achievement of every individual which should not be overestimated.

Many children, however, cannot acquire the necessary skills to overcome the feeling of being offended. Educational mistakes could result in many only trying to protect their egotism thus becoming egocentrics. As Alfred Alder, a colleague of Sigmund Freud, emphasised: a

great mistake made by many parents is to deform, to exaggerate or to waste the children's innate egotism (pride) through wrong parenting (either too authoritarian or too permissive) (Adler 1976).

If we cannot get by with our egotistical desires or our egocentric perspective, we will experience this as an insult. Every child is confronted sooner or later with this experience and, according to Jean Piaget (2003), has to overcome its egocentric perspective starting as early as age five and sometime lasting up to puberty at the latest. This is a natural development task. Insults always confront people with an aspect of their being which tends to be experienced as true. The self concept—the opinion which I have established of myself and by which I live ? is called into question.

The experience will become especially problematic if the criticism is provided by a person who is installed as a self-object (a possession) in one's life (a typical conflict between parents and children). The formerly obedient person behaves differently, judges differently than one would have expected, and/or ignores one completely. The offending aspect of these actions is substantiated in the fact that the self-object thus reveals itself as an independent subject.

“Something previously belonging to the subject now becomes independent according to its own will—this is experienced as an immediate threat” (Kind 2005: 77).

As Horst Eberhard Richter clearly demonstrates in his classic *Parents, Child, Neurosis* (1962), the impulse immediately kicks in to re-stabilise the person's own narcissistic system.

Accordingly, the re-stabilisation of the narcissistic system can take place in a twofold way:

1. As a progressive process: the Ego will be extended, i.e. a sufficient amount of self-confidence exists to cope with the experience. I am able to overcome the feeling of being offended and shall grow personally.
2. As a repressive stagnation: the Ego remains restricted. A destructive reaction follows the insult aiming to destroy the offending subject (thirst for revenge) proving that an insufficient amount of self-confidence exists that prevents me from coping with the injury. I will not grow personally.

According to Kind, “[...] [t]he self-object (Selbstobjekt) turns [...] into an offending object [...] because of its emancipation into a subject [...]” (Kind 2005: 78). Kind furthermore states that egocentrics will feel threatened if the person whom they thought they possessed becomes self-confident. Due to their own lack of self-confidence, this is unacceptable and they feel compelled to take revenge.

5.

Arno Gruen, psychologist and democracy researcher, elucidates in his book *The Insanity of Normality* (1987) that humans cannot live without *trust*. Therefore, there is more to the adequate dealing with the children’s emotions than simply taking care of them. For trust to be developed, loving care has to be provided for creating an appropriate basis. Without loving, parental care, infants and small children quickly become apathetic (Gruen 1987: 29).

Being equipped with emotional safety and trust, people able to recognise their own *strength*. This particular strength originates from inside. Continually, they find new strength to carry on even after crushing frustrations. Autonomy is the holistic condition in which one realises one’s ability to live in harmony with one’s own needs and emotions.

If emotional safety and trust are missing, strength will be sought in the external world. The inner mind is split off; one submits to a life of order which is dictated by the outside world. Others’ authority is accepted and the real meaning of life is transformed into obedience. This quickly results in dependency.

Not only is one’s own core split off but also everything is considered an opponent in the external world. Opponents are identified as those being whole and resting in themselves. The hatred of (seemingly) whole others arises out of self-hatred. Self-hatred results from self-submission which is translated into a permanent feeling of self-betrayal.

If it is not determined by autonomy but obedience, an identity will always remain damaged by its accumulations of hatred and anger.

Thus the question remains: can a large-scale educational concept compensate for such a situation? Maybe it is impossible. Dangerously, a humanistically intended identity will be instable if it is imposed from the outside because this intended identity cannot be utilised to break

down the inner hatred.

An authoritarian identity could, however, break down the inner hatred because it permits this emotion to be projected to the outside: to another person, a scapegoat. Hence, totalitarian and nationalistic groupings are popular with people full of inner hatred.

In every social and political crisis, it can be easily demonstrated that formerly unobtrusive citizens are transformed into pursuers filled with hatred. The collapse of the social order enables them to release their previously subliminal hatred with impunity. Empathy is a basic ability inherent in all living beings. It is the barrier to inhumane actions and the core of our humanity, thus also the core of our own being. However, when our being is scorned and must be separated from us because it no longer belongs to us, then the feeling of empathy can not be developed freely. Our ability to feel with and for others is stunted.” (Grün 2003: 20).

6.

By now, we have seen that humans are comprised of special innate competences—dignity and pride—which provide them with self-confidence. It became obvious that only individual personal responsibility and self-confidence supply fertile ground for good educational concepts. The concepts alone cannot provide this basis. This implies that the loving basis already needs to be set up in the parental home for a democratic identity to be developed.

Humanism is a school of thought in pedagogy. It emphasises humanity as *fighting terminus* for autonomy of individuality. Individuality has to stand up to pre-ordered powers and authorities which have precedence over it (Menze 1970: 260–1). Hence, it has to be able to offer resistance. According to the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, humanity will become the defence against the compulsions occupying human existence.

The objectives of humanist education demonstrate this clearly:

1. Educational decisions and practices are to focus on individuals and not on groups.
2. The role of emotions and personal values is to be emphasised.

3. Humanism is to enable individuals to understand the value of their fellow humans and to enhance their personal conflict-solving abilities.
4. It emphasises the importance of the basic abilities' acquisition in order to be able to live in a society comprising many cultures.

7.

The concept of wholeness surfaced repeatedly and is the fundamental principle of a humanistic pedagogy. Two basic forms of wholeness are:

1. The compound comprising a unity being a so-called "unio accidentalis". This means that it contains single, isolatable parts (such as a machine). The compound will remain unchanged even if single parts are replaced.
2. The entirety by nature is comprised of a unity constituting a "unio substantialis". It can only exist within this particular configuration (e.g. like an organism, a structure, or a system). Even the smallest changes cannot be made without re-designing the entirety. (Rombach, Schaller 1972: 54–6)

8.

My impression is that institutional educational conceptions are increasingly more strongly biased towards the first notion of wholeness. Humans are understood as machines comprised of interchangeable parts, modules, and competences which they acquire quickly, forget soon, and combine freshly to so-called additional qualifications.

Humanistic education, however, favours the second notion of wholeness. It considers humans as whole beings, as organisms which will change completely if even the smallest change occurs to its original configuration.

It could be argued that I have too little confidence in the ability of the institutions' pedagogy to produce positive results; that I would consider it impossible for institutions to create a peaceful society; that I would give up all hope as soon as parents have failed. But this, however, is not the case.

Educational concepts will not achieve positive results if a foundation of self-confidence—the feeling of being whole—and pride do not exist. Accordingly, even the conception of humans being able to learn democracy would only result in conformist followers. As soon as the social conditions change, they would turn into dangerous mob (*Massenmensch*) filled with hatred. Maybe it is destined to be that way. Unfortunately, history has provided enough examples.

Nevertheless, there is also still hope yet in the approach of “as-if”. It also could be described as a *pedagogy of “as-if”*! (Watzlawick 2008: 80–1)

People suffering from self-hatred and hatred often lack the ability to understand and empathise with themselves, the world around them, and thus other fellow humans. Only a new *behaviour* would be beneficial in this situation but not educational programmes only aiming at understanding. The philosophy of “as if” (Vaihinger 1911) demonstrates a way which simply pretends things to be “as if”. In order to understand ourselves and the world, we behave and act “as if” and thus we have the opportunity to test and practice our social abilities. This process is also known as a self-fulfilling prophecy: if educationalists do not assume that their pupils still have to be educated but instead treat their pupils “as if” they already have all the requisite positive abilities and skills; “as if” they are trusting; “as if” they are self-confident; “as if” they are whole, the pretended abilities and skills will become reality. This approach always takes its addressees by surprise and can break through their former repressive numbness.

When he invented the character of Jean Valjean, the French author Victor Hugo intended to demonstrate exactly this phenomenon in his novel *Les Misérables* (1862). Being convicted for stealing bread and after various failed attempts to break out, Jean Valjean is released from prison after nineteen years. Scorned by society and marked as a social outcast, he is lost until a bishop takes him in. Yet Valjean, filled with hatred, steals the bishop’s silver in the night. As the bishop walks in on him, Valjean knocks him down and runs away. The next morning, policemen bring him back. Well aware of Valjean’s past, the bishop lies to protect him. He claims to have given the silver voluntarily to Valjean and proves the statement by presenting Valjean with two additional can-

dleholders before the eyes of the policemen. He bids goodbye to Valjean with the words: "Never forget: With this silver, you have promised me to become an honest man."

"Hugo demonstrates to us the experience of profound changes which are possible at any time and are triggered by the unexpected and unpredictable occurring of a unexpected and unpredictable help", Paul Watzlawick observes about this scene (Watzlawick, 2008: 17).

Today's pedagogy still conceptualises the inverse notion and continually considers education from the sculptor's perspective. Its maxim is: you learn to see the world in a certain way (we are teaching you how to) so you can act accordingly. Pedagogy tries to mould children and to convey concepts as to how they should understand the world. Thus, it trusts that children and adolescents are only capable of a low competence for acting right and making decisions.

Thus, my conclusion is for a pedagogy of "as if" and acting in order to learn to understand oneself and the world. So we always can refine ourselves. Without needing to stand in the tradition of the great programmes, this pedagogy will only be successful if it is developed between humans. It also might carry the potential to cross the boundaries between the generations. It could provide a basis for the young generation to have an impact on the older one and on which traditional hierarchies can be dissolved through mutual education and care.

The maxim of this pedagogy of the "as if" is simply that at any given time I do my best to treat myself and others as dignified and respectable human beings should definitely be discussed in more detail today in the realm of education.

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In this article, I will attempt to investigate behind the scenes of an idealised world programme, often designed for schools and other educational institutions. I will focus on whether goals include changes or betterment of society through education. Every great educational programme contains some totalitarian aspects independence whether it is intended to emancipate or to oppress humans. The desire to impart an intended, planned habitus through the means of educational institutions should always be considered as problematic, since the system would need to become intolerant towards dissidents.