

Non-affirmative school didactics and life-world phenomenology

Conceptualising missing links

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Introduction

In principle, the importance of recognising students' experiences and learning holds a central position in all teaching theory; but this central assumption about how we should acknowledge and explain the relation between teaching and learning raises a number of complicated issues. For example, the vital role of the student's views and experiences in learning is in tension with the fact that teachers' work is directed by pre-given educational goals set by the teacher/school/state. More precisely, not only curriculum theory and didactics (*Didaktik*) but also life-world phenomenology, need to explain how to balance and span the gap between the regime of imposed curricula (that is, educational values and means predefined from the perspective of society) and the more open-ended, student-centred idea of freedom in schooling. A second and closely related dilemma is the pedagogical paradox of freedom. This paradox states that in order for education to be possible, the individual must be considered undetermined, that is, free, even though education seems at the same time to be a precondition for the individual to reach practical cultural freedom. Here we encounter Kant's famous question: how to cultivate freedom by external influence. Furthermore, as learning seems to require the learner's own intentional activity, we need to explain how education is expected to promote such activity.

Historically, we can identify discussions of these kinds going back at least to Plato's *Meno*, where Socrates carries out an instructional dialogue on a geometrical problem. Ever since the *Bildung*-centred theory of education was first established two centuries ago, the question how teachers might draw on and expand the student's life-world experiences in order to organise activities around selected cultural teaching contents has continued to occupy a central position. Compared to earlier didactics, the *Bildung* tradition argued for a new moral legitimation on the part of the school and teacher. In its acceptance of a non-teleological cosmology, that is, in viewing the future as radically open, European *Bildung*-centred didactics emphasised that the aim of education was now to support the learner's personal growth and freedom – and, much later, political autonomy. Since then, the core focus in the disciplines of didactics

and curriculum research has been how societally institutionalised schooling at different levels is to engage with selecting and treating cultural contents (Klafki, 2007; Deng, 2020) in order to support the student's growth as a unique and autonomous cultural and political subject, yet sharing the world with others.

In didactics, two familiar triangles are often used to visualise the dilemma. The first of these is a triangle depicting the three questions of what, how, and why; the second is a triangle depicting the teacher, the student, and the contents (Künzli, 2000). Common to both are the contents and the learner's experiences of it. Classical proponents of the Bildung-centred tradition as explicated in Humboldt's theory of Bildung, Herbart's view of 'educative teaching', and Schleiermacher's hermeneutic pedagogy share the idea that education is about an intervention in the learner's life-world. In this tradition, teaching focuses on changes in how learners relate to themselves, the world, and other humans, but these changes are themselves mediated by a treatment of the selected cultural contents of teaching (Benner, 2015b). Educative teaching is then about an intervention in the subject's relation to herself (I/Me), to others (I/You, I/We, We/You), and to the world (I/It) by artificially working on selected cultural contents. Sometimes this is said to occur through the 'freeing' of the educative qualities (*Bildungsgehalt*) of the selected contents (*Bildungsinhalt*). Such *educative teaching* (*Erziehende Unterricht*) aims at human growth. Teaching contents are always secondary to this aim. Educative teaching is thus to invite and lead learners to engage in questions to which existing knowledge (i.e. selected teaching contents) is an answer. Educative teaching thus implies the idea of supporting the learners in critically dwelling upon similarities and differences between the values and knowledge claims in the contents, on the one hand, and their own previous experiences and understanding on the other, in order to establish the validity of these experiences and understandings, and possibly move beyond them.

In our argument for the value of exploring teaching, studying, and learning from a phenomenological perspective, we want to call attention to the hermeneutic vantage point. Hermeneutics has a double role, both theoretical and methodological, in phenomenologically oriented research on teaching, studying, and learning. First, on the theoretical level, teachers operate by interpreting the world, the contents, and the student. In such interpretative activity they participate in an ongoing deliberation around the aim, meaning, contents, and methods of teaching. They mediate between the students and the world by creating pedagogical spaces for critical reflection and action. If we take such contextual and deliberative dimensions as our point of departure, they then require attention when developing theory within didactics and curriculum studies has to take them into account. Second, from the preceding it follows that when we want to make sense of the empirical findings of teachers' and students' experiences of the teaching contents, we need to acknowledge the broader institutional, political, and cultural context. A deliberative and hermeneutically oriented life-world approach to research on teaching would then

expand the questions posed by the traditional didactic triangles (c.f. Uljens, 1997). In teaching there is always:

- somebody (who?) is presenting/pointing/showing at
- something (what contents? *Bildungsinhalt*)
- *as* something (what meaning? Potential *Bildungsgehalt*)
- in some ways (how?)
- to somebody else (who?)
- to reach towards aims (which?)
- for some reason (why?)
- with some justification/obligation (which?)
- somewhere (where?)
- in relation to different societal interests (which?)

Understanding teaching in context

In order to train our focus on students' life-world experiences in pedagogical settings, we need to consider *teaching in its context*. Paradoxically, as organised teaching and related learning opportunities are now so widespread both in working life and on social media – once learning is all over, so to speak – schools have gradually lost their unique character as 'temples of learning'. This may have contributed to a crisis of general didactics as it does not seem valid for teaching and learning outside schools. On the other hand, the fact that we have moved into a 'learning society' has led to renewed exploration of what kind of pedagogical knowledge is indeed required for understanding teaching, studying, and learning in schools – something that is obviously very different from experiential real-life learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Schools stand out as very specific contexts for teaching and learning in their own right. They were established when participation in everyday practice was no longer adequate to reveal necessary insights. Indeed, as research on real-life learning cannot replace research on learning in schools, we welcome an ongoing rediscovery of teaching in schools as a problem of its own in didactics and curriculum research (Biesta, 2017). Yet, in principle, subject didactic research claims validity for both inside and outside school settings. In this light, *school didactics* might be a more fruitful and accurate delineation of *subject didactics*. However, research in the separate field of subject didactics, almost without exception, locates its object of study *within* schools. In this respect, subject didactics is, practically taken, school didactics. This also means that school didactics as a field of research always includes a subject didactic dimension – teaching, studying, and learning is always teaching, studying, and learning something (see the preceding list). Conceptualising subject didactics for school settings is thus different from subject didactics aimed for understanding teaching, studying, and learning outside school settings. A solution to these dilemmas was sought by introducing *school didactics* as a field of research in the 1990s (Uljens, 1997). In Germany, this

field is identified as (or sometimes included in) ‘*Schulpädagogik*’ (Meyer, 1997; Rothland and Lüders, 2018).

Lee Schulman’s definition of pedagogical content knowledge in the 1980s, framing professional teachers’ competence, would also fall within what is referred to as school didactics. In Finland, professorial chairs in pedagogical content knowledge or subject didactics, as they were called, were established on a large scale in 1974 when primary school teacher education moved to the universities and was developed into a five-year master’s of education degree. School didactics as a field of research does not bear the burden of general didactics in attempting to explain teaching, studying, and learning irrespective of context. Acknowledging school didactics may also help to avoid the risk we see in the rapid differentiation of the field of subject didactics. Indeed, we see representatives of subject didactics today striving towards more general approaches, such as general pedagogical content knowledge or generalised subject didactics (Vollmer, 2014).

From a phenomenological life-world perspective, too, the contents of teaching, as well as social life in and outside school, are central. In school didactics, the *contents* of teaching are located at the very centre of the teaching/studying/learning process, maintaining a distinction between the content as intended, as practised, as experienced, and as evaluated. The teaching content is the medium through which the individual comes to share the world with others (socialisation), and at the same time discovers their own self and their own uniqueness (personalisation). Realising that the contents are both the medium of the process of individuation (*Bildung*) and also the medium for aiming beyond the given contents themselves, we identify similarities with Bill Pinar’s approach to curriculum studies (Pinar, 2011). Perhaps in contrast to Pinar’s approach, school didactics as a field of research is also interested in how pedagogical activity operates to expand the learner’s life-world (Uljens and Ylimaki, 2017). In fact, this is one of the classical questions in both didactics and curriculum studies (English, 2013; Wahlström, 2020), expressed already by Kant in his questions of how it is possible to support the development of individual autonomy using external influence (Benner, 2015b). Furthermore, in emphasising as a research field that curriculum work, pedagogical practice, and evaluation at different levels are reciprocally related core issues, school didactics is a field of research that has the potential to span general didactics and subject didactics. A multi-level approach to curriculum work, leadership, and teaching (Gundem, 1997) has increasingly gained support in curriculum studies, building upon discursive institutionalism (e.g. Nordin and Sundberg, 2014) and on curriculum studies doing transnational policy transfer research (e.g. Steiner-Khamsi and Waldow, 2012). And lately, educational leadership as curriculum work has come to be seen as an important but neglected field of knowledge for understanding curriculum reform and school development (Uljens, 2015; Uljens and Ylimaki, 2017).

Understanding research on teaching in context

Earlier in the chapter we argued for a contextual awareness, both regarding theorising teaching and in doing research on teaching. One aspect of such contextual awareness with relevance also for life-world-oriented curriculum research and didactics has to do with how various approaches conceptually respond to policy developments in education (for example), as Englund (1986) convincingly demonstrated. The answer depends partly on whether a conceptual position in didactics is considered a theory or a doctrine. To the extent that didactics is considered a doctrine, it typically aims to present normative alternatives to existing curricular ideologies or prescriptive instructions informing teaching methods. When didactics is considered as a theory, as in this chapter, the aim is to refine concepts as analytical tools which allow us to talk about education more precisely (Uljens, 1997, p. 112f.; Uljens and Ylimaki, 2017, p. 10ff.).

There is also an epistemological reason for asking how contemporary developments in didactics and curriculum studies relate to a broader policy context. As pointed out already by Schleiermacher (1998), we do not claim that educational theories are universal over time and culture. Educational theories need to be analysed in context. Limiting our attention to only the past few decades, we would argue that the increased focus on subject didactics since the 1980s and the parallel movement towards an output-centred curriculum policy are in part expressions of similar societal movements. Both are responses, though very different ones, to a performative, instrumental, back-to-basics movement. One argument for such an interpretation would be that the neoconservative ‘cultural canon’ movement in curriculum policy is used to define core features of what it is to be an educated or a qualified member of a society or nation (Young, 2008). This reflects the traditional ‘material’ approach to subject didactics. In addition, what we call the ‘competency canon’ policy movement supports an instrumental or performative view of knowledge by promoting practice-relevant sets of competencies. The focus on tasks or generic competencies within wider contexts reflect a ‘formal’ theory of *Bildung*. Further, while the cultural canon draws on an experienced deficit in societal and cultural coherence, the competency canon is based on ambitions of serving the needs of working life and economy. The fundamental dilemma for both approaches is not their respective valuing of cultural knowledge or useful competencies but the fact that while both emphasise contents in an output-centred policy, both are at risk of ending up with instrumental teaching and learning because the expected competences tend to be set in advance. A related dilemma is that they do not see contents or competencies as interrelated vehicles for inviting students to engage in contents intended to develop personality, cultural identity, and citizenship – *Bildung*, in other words.

Adopting a critical hermeneutical view of curriculum formation and teaching as mediating activities within fields of contrasting interests and power structures

and hermeneutic epistemology, our argument in this chapter is that phenomenological life-world research also makes sense as a part of the research field of school didactics. A life-world approach that does not take account of curriculum as a field of social, political, institutional, and professional struggles risks going wrong. Although we come to didactics from a hermeneutic Bildung-centred tradition of theorising education, we support Englund's idea of deliberative curriculum research:

This view of curriculum content and school subjects implies that we see them as contingent moral and political constructions that are constantly reshaped, without definite limits, capable of being interpreted and realised in different ways, politically contested at all levels, and in an ever-changing situation in relation to the struggle between different social forces.
(2015, p. 51)

Our approach is closer to a transactional view of realist epistemology in curriculum research than a transcendental approach (Wahlström, 2020).

Sharing the worries expressed by Wheelahan (2010) that theoretical knowledge is increasingly marginalised in favour of competency-based training, we wish to reassert that theoretical knowledge in schools not only creates critical distance to practice, but may also educate beyond the knowledge itself. By turning learners' attention to those questions that theoretical knowledge aim at answering, promotes awareness to pose these very questions differently.

A challenge for didactics and for phenomenological learning research

The theory of, and research in, didactics typically values the intention to grasp the learner's experiences in the pedagogical process. These experiences are often discussed in terms of the learner's understanding and experience of the *contents* and, naturally, changes in this understanding. Life-world phenomenology again emphasises the notion of a *shared world*. This shared world may be a starting point, but it is also the result of a pedagogical process. A challenge for both didactics and life-world phenomenology is to what extent they contain conceptually satisfying answers to the question of how teaching is seen as related to learning: in other words, how they explain pedagogical interaction as a movement from one 'shared world' to another. What kind of concepts do we need to make sense of how we as individuals come to share an understanding of the world? How do we explain in theoretical terms what kind of activities or processes are in operation when this occurs? How, then, does teaching influence the individual's move *into* and *beyond* a given life-world?

The question of how human beings can share a view of the world is certainly not for only education or didactics to deal with. In the philosophy of mind and in social philosophy, these questions are analysed in terms of how subjectivity

relates to intersubjectivity. The debate of how to relate subjectivity and intersubjectivity was originally initiated by J. G. Fichte in his critique of Kant. The debate, far from losing its significance, has been a recurring topic. In fact, in the last two decades there has been internationally increasing awareness that this debate has value in the theorising of teaching. A recent tendency in European social philosophy has been to emphasise the importance of intersubjectivity (Varga and Gallagher, 2012). As Brinkman and Friesen (2018) recognise, the reason phenomenological philosophy is pregnant with significant potentials for the educational field is that it addresses crucial issues that concern precisely the experiential and intersubjective dimensions of pedagogy. We may therefore ask if life-world phenomenology contains a language that is sufficient for explaining learning. Or, perhaps it is the other way around – that educational theory indeed provides us with the conceptual tools to help us understand what it means to come to share the world and to move beyond our previous understanding. We argue, though, that it is not only life-world research that could be supported by elaborating the theory of education. For all the didactic triangles, we note that many contemporary positions in didactics and in curriculum theory are in fact underdeveloped when it comes to explaining the core issues of the field itself: that is, how teaching influences studying that in turn may result in learning.

The more general dilemma regarding subjectivity and intersubjectivity – important in didactics, curriculum, and education theory perspectives – is the long-standing debate over what ‘comes first’, subjectivity or intersubjectivity. The question is whether either of these two can be considered more fundamental than the other. Do we have to assume some form of subjectivity in order for intersubjectivity to be established? Or does some kind of intersubjectivity always have to be assumed in order for anything like subjectivity to be established? As the task of education typically is about supporting both the establishment of the subject’s individuality and her cultural belonging, we see how crucial this question is in didactics. What kind of subjectivity does education aim at, and what kind of subjectivity does education presuppose? Should a theory of education take its point of departure in some version of intersubjectivity instead, for example in a phenomenological life-world? On the other hand, if we, in theorising education, assume that the individual already *shares* a cultural life-world, then, obviously, the individual has already become a part of a life-world. How did that happen?

Versions of subject-centred and intersubjectivity-centred positions

In philosophy, there are various ways to understand subject-centred and intersubjectivity-based conceptions of subjectivity. In phenomenology, too, different positions exist regarding intersubjectivity. In contrast to Husserl’s subject-centred philosophy, Merleau-Ponty, Buber, Bakhtin, Mead, Levinas, Taylor, and Rancière

have all challenged the subject-centred, individualistic, rationalistic approach. In this chapter, we limit ourselves to Merleau-Ponty as representative of a phenomenology that emphasises intersubjectivity as a core concept. But we wish to reassert that the tradition of modern education theory as originally developed between 1760 and 1840 did give an account of the relation between subjectivity and intersubjectivity. That tradition argues that subjectivity and intersubjectivity are not mutually exclusive. Our argument is that there is a need for different versions of both subjectivity and intersubjectivity. In addition, in modern education, the dynamics between these versions of subjectivity and intersubjectivity are explained by pedagogical concepts: ‘recognition’, *Bildsamkeit*, ‘summoning to self-activity’. We will discuss this tradition in terms of the non-affirmative theory of education (Benner, 2015a).

In the philosophy of mind, we can historically identify two different but complementary subject-philosophical positions. According to a so-called *ego-logical* conception, ‘the Other’ is constituted by the experience of the subject. This is the traditional subject-philosophical position: the encapsulated subject is at the centre of the world and experiences the external and outside world exclusively from this position (Crossley, 1996). Husserl’s philosophical epistemology represents such a position. Knowledge of the outside world is thought to be achievable, but that knowledge is based on the fact that the outside world is something subjectively experienced. Thus, the meaning of the world is subordinated to the experience of the self, and thus reducible to subjectivity rather than intersubjectivity. Descartes’ “I am thinking, therefore I exist” also expresses such an ego-logical view, and Kant’s separation between the phenomenal world and the thing-in-itself (*Ding an sich*) also reflects a subject-centred position.

A kind of reversed position, though still subject-centred, is the recognition-oriented philosophy of mind, as represented by Hegel. Here the self as recognised by the other is of primordial significance. The other’s recognition of the self subordinates the subject’s coming into being to the other, so that the self is partly constituted by the other’s experience. If we transpose this to the sphere of child-rearing and early education, the adult, by the act of loving, invites the child to the most basic form of self-esteem (see e.g. Heidegren, 2009; Honneth, 1996).

Intersubjectivity-based life-world phenomenology

In the course of the twentieth century, the phenomenological research tradition came to regard intersubjectivity as a necessary point of departure, thus replacing Kantian and Husserlian epistemologically oriented transcendental idealism. Kant had explained that knowledge of the thing-in-itself was not possible, only of the thing-as-experienced. Husserl had accepted the Kantian assumption in his phenomenological epistemology, developing a position in which the life-world in all its richness was accepted as a fundamental point of departure, but insisting that true knowledge claims had their origin in phenomenological reflection on the world as experienced. The life-world had to be bracketed.

Later, Husserlian epistemological phenomenology, based as it was on the primacy of the subject, was transformed by Merleau-Ponty into an ontological/existential phenomenology based on intersubjectivity.

In the deep-rooted thought tradition of philosophical idealism – transcendental idealism – the subject is more or less understood as self-constitutive (Bengtsson, 1991; Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1989; Winch, 1998). The transcendental approach to phenomenology defended an individualistic knowledge theory. An individualistic philosophy means one that reduces everything to the individual, who is consistently understood as an autonomous being.

For Husserl, personal, life-world-based experiences had to be transcended in order to reach true knowledge. What made such a project possible was, first, the assumption of a pure, transcendental ego. Second, given that Husserl's phenomenology is a theory of knowledge, he advocated an abstraction method in his persistent search for pure (i.e. absolute) experiences: that is, insight undistorted by the experiencing subject's own life history. Husserl intended this abstraction method to do full justice to subjectively experienced phenomena. As the position was developed as a general epistemology, not as a theory of teaching and learning, Husserl's interest is therefore of lesser value. Rather, theorising education needs to start from the concrete life-world, where people of flesh and blood meet, where they share and link empirically based life experiences with each other. This is precisely the starting point of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics.

For Husserl, there existed two versions of intersubjectivity. The first was the taken-as-given everyday world where we operate and where we are in a 'natural attitude'. In this life-world, the other is co-present with the subject. The second version of intersubjectivity is what can be called a transcendental intersubjectivity, that is, general, shared, and true knowledge. This is no longer a question of embodied, shared everyday experience but general conceptual knowledge that unites (Bengtsson, 1991, 2001; Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1989). It is indeed common to understand conceptual knowledge in this way, but in Husserl's phenomenology this transcendental sphere implies that all influence from social, cultural, and historical conditions is put in parenthesis and thus 'purified' of empirical relativity (Uljens, 1992). Consequently, the life-world is here significantly reduced to the decontextualised experience of the individual beyond embodied intersubjectivity, that is, withdrawn from its worldly empirical basis (Bengtsson, 2001; Kullenberg, 2015; Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1989).

These subject-centred positions, the first starting from the primacy of the self, the second from the primacy of the other, can be contrasted with a philosophy that assumes intersubjectivity as its first principle. Crossley conceptualises this as radical intersubjectivity. He sees in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy the radical concept of intersubjective perception:

By defining perception as an opening to another that functions on a pre-reflexive, pre-objective and pre-egological level, the solipsist idea is challenged about private perceptual worlds.

(1996, p. 29)

Here the focus turns to the common sphere – an intermediate world – where these perceptual worlds are conceived as both overlapping and interlaced. Given this, it follows that human consciousness can be defined as a radically interpersonal opening to alterity, that is, the genuine other (and all that is different from oneself), as opposed to the egological view of reduction of the other to the self's experience. This also indicates that intersubjectivity is no longer regarded merely as a function or result of an acting subject but rather as an independent dimension – existential, linguistic, or practical – that reflects lived experience. Such intersubjectivism thus assumes that the subject's subjectivity follows from something that can already be considered shared.

As we have seen, for early transcendental phenomenology only the absolute and unconditional ego, beyond empirical and worldly grounding, remains significant. By contrast, Merleau-Ponty (1962/1989) belongs to a group of phenomenologists who seek an alternative. Could a genuinely interpersonal understanding that builds upon reciprocity help us to move beyond the framework of a narrow Husserlian interpretation of intersubjective premises? Merleau-Ponty (1962/1989) elaborates on the difficulty of being a subject who gains an in-depth knowledge of himself through inward-looking reflection (introspection). This may seem like a paradox, because in a well-known sense we stand closest to ourselves. Our instantly given life-world and our natural, embodied orientation to it is a basic premise for this natural point of view: in what we want, feel, think, and in what we do, our life-world is insurmountable in the sense that we are always conditionally bound to our lived bodies (Bengtsson, 2001).

However, bodily experiences are not limited to a specific type of biological phenomenon in the phenomenological sense (for instance, not limited exclusively to the brain's neurological cognitions). Instead, bodily being should be understood on the basis of existential dimensions. Moreover, the lived body cannot be considered free from social, historical, and cultural premises. Through personal reflection, cultural experiences are an inseparable part of life-world conditions, a part of being able to navigate in life, to find communities, and, above all, to find meaningful development. The significance of existential reflection is thus emphasised.

Educational challenges for life-world phenomenology

As already discussed, Fichte was the first theorist of teaching to criticise the transcendental philosophical idealism represented by Kant (although this insight into the evolution of European educational theory has now been forgotten). The relational tradition of thought, which emphasises the importance of the empirical other, began with Fichte's work and was further developed by Hegel, then by Vygotsky, Mead, Dewey, and Habermas, while the subject-centred Cartesian–Kantian tradition was furthered by Husserl and Piaget. The so-called linguistic turn within philosophy, with its critique of the problematic

idea of the primacy of the transcendental and individualist subject, achieved widespread acceptance. As the early theorists of education, including Schleiermacher, acknowledged the importance of concrete experience in becoming and being human, many phenomenologists also underlined the significance of such an experience-based, intersubjective approach to education. But while accepting a life-world-based phenomenology brings with it clear benefits and strengths over a subject-centred transcendental phenomenology, it also brings its own pedagogical dilemma. The most crucial of these is that as long as the concept of life-world refers to already encultured subjects, that is, subjects who already live together and more or less unreflectively share an everyday concrete world comprising language and practice, there is a risk that the truly educational issue escapes us deceptively. To the extent subjects share the world, education cannot be about subjects coming to share the world. Such a position is not either well equipped for explaining what it means to move beyond this shared world. Let us explain.

As we pointed out in our discussion of recognition, a premise in all education is that learners and teachers already share the world. At the same time teaching aims at moving beyond existing ways of knowing and coming to share the world in new ways, beyond what is the case. Education thus paradoxically argues that we both do share the world and do not yet share the world. It is also crucial that every teacher see the person in question as the unique subject she/he is, in parallel with the student being a fellow among others (recognition). A premise for an individual's further development in educational matters is that the pedagogue can and will interpret, through dialogue, the learned experience of the learner. Among other phenomenologists, Bengtsson (1997) subscribed to the form of pedagogical action described here – an education based on recognition of the potential of the learners based on a practical intersubjectivity. But how is the change from one form of intersubjectivity to another explained? And what is the role of the pedagogue as we move in and beyond such a person-oriented world, for instance, from home to school or from school to work, developing new understandings as we transcend the old? In our opinion, pedagogical action is guided by the ambition to “bridge between students' different regional worlds and in meetings with people outside the school's regional world, such as home but also hospitals, habilitation and social authorities” (Bengtsson and Berndtsson, 2015, p. 19, our translation). The pedagogue would then guide that learning through the intricate relationships and contexts of life by raising awareness and helping to interpret the student's experience-based reality.

One more aspect of note needs to be mentioned when considering the pedagogical implications of life-world phenomenology. This perspective, owing to its knowledge-theoretical recognition of people's unique and experience-based life-worlds, ultimately endorses an *existential* take on being, learning, and teaching: even in the learning of cognitive content, the whole existence is involved, not just the reason; without the involvement of existence, we cannot

speak of learning. Existence is thus very important for learning (Bengtsson and Berndtsson, 2015, p. 25f.).

It is important to add that life-world phenomenologists highlight various kinds of action rather than exclusively intellectual ones. For Merleau-Ponty, *all* kinds of skills are viewed as both body-based and experience-based in the widest sense, beyond the realm of pure cognition and mental reasoning. Bengtsson advocated an education that explores what it means to live in a human world with other people:

how we can be influenced by other people in their capacity of being other subjects and not just things, that is, how upbringing is possible, which is about relationships between people as subjects, and not between human beings and things or things and things.

(1997, p. 13)

Subjectivity and intersubjectivity in a non-affirmative theory of education

Having demonstrated that we may identify different ways of understanding subjectivity and intersubjectivity in phenomenology, in what follows we point out how these are discussed in non-affirmative education theory. Rather than taking either subjectivity or intersubjectivity as its point of departure, non-affirmative theory argues in favour of an educational approach that distinguishes between several forms of subjectivity and intersubjectivity at play (Uljens, 2001; Uljens and Ylimaki, 2017).

In non-affirmative theory it is argued that, in his or her summons of the learner to engage in a learning process, the pedagogue cannot exclusively assume a shared life-world or some form of mutuality (symmetry) between self and other. Symmetry – or rather the negation of *asymmetry* in the form of the establishment of a shared life-world – is sought through the pedagogical process. But the opposite is also true. In his or her summons or invitation of the learner into an activity aimed at learning, the pedagogue cannot rely solely on a radical and total difference (*asymmetry*) between self and other, because an *asymmetry* is part of the objective of the pedagogical process. A ‘sought-for *asymmetry*’, in other words, refers to the aim of the pedagogical process: namely, that the individual develops uniqueness in a cultural sense, a uniqueness that did not originally exist.

We see that neither a symmetrical intersubjectivity nor an asymmetrical subjectivity can suffice as either the point of departure or the end point of education. To express this differently, at the beginning of the educational process we share the world to some extent, but not totally. Perhaps we speak the same language, but we are not the same. At the end of the educational process, again, we find ourselves as subjects that differ from others, but also as subjects that share the world in new ways. At the beginning of the educational process we

are the same, yet we are also different from each other. But at the same time, it is true that through the process of education we *become* the same, yet we also become different from each other. Didactics is thus the science of being and becoming both the same (intersubjectivity) and different (subjectivity). The paradox of didactics is that we are what we become, and that we become what we are – the same and different. This presents us with two problems. First, what do *same* and *different* mean? Second, what concepts do we need for talking about this dynamic process?

The relationship between the different forms of subjectivity and intersubjectivity can be explained using the relational pedagogical concepts of *Bildsamkeit* and summoning to self-activity. We want to demonstrate that we can draw on these classical concepts when speaking about phenomenological dimensions of pedagogy (Benner, 2005; von Oettingen, 2001; Uljens, 2001).

Bildsamkeit refers both to the human capacity to learn allowing of influencing the other by educational means and to the learner's activity aiming at learning. In the present context, the principle of *Bildsamkeit* refers to the individual's engaging in learning activity, in pedagogical situations. In such situations, the learner has accepted a pedagogical invitation or provocation and, in a way, is open to becoming engaged in and by an activity, having been summoned to this by the pedagogue. The principle of *Bildsamkeit* means that the learner is recognised as a subject with a *potentiality* of self-activity. This potentiality is made real through the subject's own actions in an educational space. An educational space refers to a common world established between teacher and learner through the summoning of the learner to self-activity (or self-initiated activity). *Bildsamkeit* thus refers to the individual's reflection on enacted experiences, his or her relationship to the world (Benner, 2015a; Uljens, 2001). How this educational dynamic takes place in each case is by definition impossible to predict. Through educational actions from the teacher's side, with the learning subject, a space of education is established. This pedagogical space is a temporary construction, a space that depends on the engagement of the subjects involved. The experiential or virtual space is a space in which the learner does not feel alone but experiences being seen and recognised, experiences being accepted but also challenged, experiences being involved in working on a topic. The space offers the subject a learning opportunity to exceed herself.

Insofar as it summons the learner to self-activity – that is, calling the other to self-promotion – educational activity entails (1) recognising the subject's potential and ability to engage in self-promoted learning (hence the potential for reaching empirical or cultural freedom is a guiding assumption), but also, importantly, (2) being attentive to the concrete life situation of the other, their phenomenological or experiential reality and personal life history (Goodson and Sykes, 2001). Such cultural awareness and knowledge is important. How the learner appears to perceive herself and the world is crucial, and it points to the phenomenological sphere of interest. It is important for a learner to experience the teacher as somebody who cares for her and somebody who is

present for the other in the educational situation, *meeting* and *seeing* the student as they appear as an existential subject to the teacher (Nordström-Lytz, 2013). A further dimension of recognition is related to the educator's actions supporting the individual's development of a reflected own will. This aspect is linked to the goal of the process, that is, to acknowledging the other's potential independence or autonomy as a goal of education. Finally, if the establishment of the individual's self-image is dependent on social interaction with others, and if the ability to discern and critical, autonomous thinking are regarded as individual rights, then pedagogical activity can be seen as a response to the moral demand that arises from recognising these particular rights (Fichte, 2000). The concept of self-promotion can then be seen as a lived enactment of our moral responsibility for the other.

The teacher's recognition consists in truly seeing the other as a unique person, assuming both that the individual's development is not determined by something totally pre-given and that the growing persons are entitled to find themselves and their 'voice' through their own activities. Pedagogical encouragement thus points to the need to consciously observe the ways in which a child responds to the call for self-promotion, without assuming (as in conventional affirmative pedagogy) that they should end up at a predetermined form of perception. One important implication for educators is therefore that non-affirmative education is emphatically critical of educational ideas, ideologies, and curricular policies that overemphasise either socialisation to existing norms in society or the fostering of values that form a predetermined future. Both these perspectives, in our view, exemplify normative/prescriptive educational thinking. One example of such future-oriented normative education is emancipatory pedagogy, also known as critical education. Here, what the student is to be liberated to and for, and all the normative values embedded in the process, are already known in advance. The goal is thus already outlined, and the teacher's task is consequently, with the help of methodology, to guide the student to the beginning of the course. Our critical point here is that normative socialising pedagogy, like societal transformational education, can easily overshadow the student's own development, preferences, and life experiences and therefore become a kind of educational indoctrination (Uljens and Ylimäki, 2017; Matusov and Lemke, 2015).

By contrast, a non-affirmative call for self-promotion insists that the learning process should be guided also by the student's own voice. The teacher's use of communicative provocations as an educational action should deliberately refrain from unproblematically confirming both current social interests and ideal future states (cf. von Oettingen, 2016; Kullenberg and Eksath, 2017). Such a conscious pedagogical judgement can create space for a process of learning that acknowledges the student's right to exercise conscious initiatives and actions within the educational dialogue. Such a position is also value-driven, yet reveals a careful approach to the act of teaching and leadership, especially in relation to the young. Leaders and teachers in democratic public school

systems are, by law, expected to follow the spirit of a curriculum and respect such interests. At the same time, teachers are expected to adopt teaching to the unique needs, interests, and circumstances at hand. Non-affirmative theory solves this tension by arguing that while teachers must recognise curricular aims and contents, they must not simply affirm these aims and contents. To do so would mean failing to problematise these aims and contents for and with students, thereby reducing education to transmitting given values and contents.

The non-affirmative approach also has to deal with a pedagogical paradox, but now in a new version. This version of the paradox states that the individual has to be treated as if she/he were already capable of what she/he is being encouraged to do and already capable of realising her freedom through her own activity (Benner, 2015a). As Benner puts it, pedagogical action involves treating the other as if the learner were already capable of what they are called to and what the other through its own activities may conquer. An example is when a child is learning to stand on her/his own feet and is asked to take a few steps across the floor to a waiting adult who will embrace her/him. Here the child is treated as if it can already walk, even if it is through responding to the parent's call through their own activity that they learn to take their first steps in life. But it is an open question whether this happens or not: time will tell, but we do not know for sure in advance. When Herbart refers to the concept of *pedagogical tact*, his intention is to show that the call not only falls back upon recognition of the freedom of others in itself, but that it must, in order to function, be experienced as reasonable by the other person in the dialogue. In such tactful action, the pedagogue shows awareness of the empirical reality, life situation, and identity of others, even as this may appear in the eyes of the other.

A final word

We have demonstrated, and problematised, the relation between life-world phenomenology and a theory of pedagogical activity based on non-affirmative education theory and structured within the research field of school didactics. Both life-world phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology offer us a fruitful language for talking about the individual's formation (the theory of *Bildung*). The phenomenological theory of *Bildung* typically views the life-world as open, intersubjective, and changeable in its ongoing complexity. This acknowledgement of openness and radical intersubjectivity, accommodating existential dialogues, has intriguing educational implications. In contemporary phenomenology, we find a language of education and human learning that in some respects reflects the concepts used in non-affirmative education theory. For example, Van Manen (1991) clearly takes such an interpretative, guiding approach in his *The Tact of Teaching: The Meaning of Pedagogical Thoughtfulness*. In fact, he even suggests subtle *non-action* as an important pedagogical act, a tactful 'holding back' when teaching children (p. 78). 'Holding back' includes a recognising dimension. It prepares a space for the other, but it also has a

summoning dimension. Being silent in front of the learner in the context of a structured educational situation both invites and challenges the learner to involve herself. On the question of mediating between worlds, Van Manen also emphasises children's everyday world as a crucial influence alongside the influence of those who are pedagogically responsible for them. Interestingly, in contrast with more conventionally authoritarian educational regimes, he sees the role of teaching as somewhat discreet, due to the normative idea that the pedagogue should try to avoid directly influencing the child as much as possible. He takes seriously the risk of imposing too many values and guidelines on young learners in this life-world-oriented approach to teaching. As he puts it: "To teach is to influence the influences. The teacher uses the influence of the world pedagogically as a resource for tactfully influencing the child" (p. 80).

Meyer-Drawe (1984) also developed an educational theory of intersubjectivity based on Merleau-Ponty's existential principles. She argues that self-perception and other kinds of experience are dialectically intertwined and form a 'middle embodiment' (*Zwischenleiblichkeit*) in which the intersubjective dynamics of seeing and being seen can be realised in a way that has educational relevance. We cannot become human beings without the other's response, she suggests, thereby defending the dialogue-oriented foundation for knowledge-building developed by our earliest teaching theorists. Truly dialogic intersubjectivity between teacher and student not only legitimates the student's own voice and needs but also accepts a portion of unexpected dialogue and, consequently, a knowledge development beyond the pre-given and ready-made. The strength of phenomenology is, obviously, that it recognises the educational significance of lived experience. In the practice of teaching as well as educational research, it implies interpreting that is open-minded and other-oriented, understanding the learner's lived experience in its current life-world context.

Despite the strengths, we argue that life-world phenomenology does not adequately explain how the learning individual may really transcend her life-world-based socialisation – or, more precisely, what role the pedagogical act may be assigned in that process. A second dilemma with life-world phenomenology is limited analytical attention to how power structures and policies operate in directing teachers and students' work. Despite fruitful attempts, life-world phenomenology does not seem to provide elaborate conceptual or analytical tools that can explain how politically agreed curricula direct initiation and transgression that occur in educational practices like schools. Life-world phenomenology tends to limit its focus to the student's perspective, thus disregarding the very specific contextual factors in school teaching. After all, strongly directing decisions of aims and contents are made before and beyond the classroom.

In our view, the non-affirmative pedagogical theory incorporates much of the ideas developed within life-world phenomenology but challenges phenomenological learning theory by providing a conceptual language for the explication of human learning and the role of teaching in this learning. The

non-affirmative approach to education promotes a liberal, person-oriented path of learning, focusing the individual's space of lived experience as related to selected cultural contents didactically treated within an institutionalised school (Benner, 2015b; Uljens and Ylimaki, 2017). On the part of the teacher, teaching in schools is an interpretative and mediational activity between the students' life-worlds and culture, mediated by the contents of the curriculum. In a non-affirmative school didactics these contents offer the medium by which the subject is summoned to reflection on her relation to herself, others, and the world in order to transcend her present state by her own activity. Non-affirmative school didactics makes visible that to the extent to which teachers are entitled not to affirm, that is, to question and problematise existing curricula, their degrees of freedom increase to create space for students' interests and life-worlds. This position also reminds that the task for the teacher is not limited to recognising the learners' life-worlds but to challenge them to work on their experiences. In this sense, we are arguing for a critical discussion of the idea of standardised and detailed curricula, defined without the student's own ideas and established as a guiding tool that leaves only limited space for open-ended or unexpected knowledge created in and through pedagogical dialogues. Consequently, we advocate further research exploring the theory of pedagogical action in life-world phenomenology – and vice versa.

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