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On the Relationship between Praxeology and Phenomenology

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Introduction
Tacit dimensions of pedagogy are meant to challenge explicit dimensions. The explicit side of pedagogy covers univocal pedagogical rules and tasks, well-defined operations and interventions as well as distinct pedagogical situations etc. Tacit accentuations, implicit meanings, forms of nonverbal communication and interaction as e.g. a hidden curriculum, inexplicable knowledge, iconic or spatial/architectural representations etc. are supposed to undermine, modify as well as challenge the explicit aspects of pedagogy. The terms “tacit”, “hidden”, “implicit”, “nonverbal”, “inexplicable” etc. already give a general hint to the variety of tacit aspects of a pedagogical situation constituting a sort of incidental scenery. In order to grasp this variety from a distinct angle, I will introduce the term “absent”.

In educational practice, this tacit scenery might open up for and even grant significant education and learning processes, however it can also have the opposite effect. Tacit factors might empower learners and pedagogues in understanding and creating the world, or they might constrain them. In order to work out this scenery scientifically not only diverse tacit phenomena, but also practical-operative aspects linked with them as well as epistemological-methodological questions will be considered. Some of these practical-operative aspects will be shaped here in the light of praxeology as a scientific approach that focuses on them explicitly, and they will be traced in bodily phenomenology.

Praxeology and Phenomenology
The most obvious approach to the topic of my contribution would be to explicate Pierre Bourdieu critique on the phenomenology of Husserl and that of Schütz as a transcendental epistemology.¹

¹ See Bourdieu 1977, 1990
However, newer German phenomenologists, as Bernhard Waldenfels and Käte Meyer-Drawe, would not contradict Bourdieu’s praxeological standpoint. The bodily phenomenology of Waldenfels and Meyer-Drawe to a high degree corresponds to later German positions in praxeology, e.g. that of Dietrich Benner. From this perspective, the common ground of praxeology and phenomenology turns out to be much broader than what might at first be indicated. The approach of bodily phenomenology is based on the argument that the everyday orientation and here a kind of practical sense is the starting point for anthropology, pedagogy and epistemology. However, Waldenfels and Meyer-Drawe put the autonomy and free will of the subject into brackets questioning it in a fundamental way whilst working out the limitations of knowing and insight.

Thus, the question I will focus on in my presentation is: how is orientation in learning processes modelled by the phenomenological concept of Käte Meyer-Drawe and by the praxeological concept of Dietrich Benner? Which role do tacit dimensions play here?

“Absence” as an epistemological-methodological term

In order to get an insight into the diversity of tacit phenomena in general as well as grasp some qualifying notions of these phenomena and some important epistemological-methodological questions, I will unfold the metatheoretical viewpoint developed by Patrick Fuery (1995). In his concept of “absence” the multi-layered multiplicity of the incidental tacit scenery mentioned above is widely displayed. Fuery introduces the term “absence” as an operative instrument to analyse recent philosophical theories, as for instance existentialist, psychoanalytist and post-structuralist theories. Beyond that, the term is supposed to allow for the reflection of “[…] the various systemic and interpretative models […] in general[,] including the ideological, hermeneutic, ontological, and political”² views.

Fuery (1995) states that on one hand a relation of “absence” and “presence” is formed by theory. On the other hand this relation founds the methodology of and the epistemological approach to a theory. However, it is read as an operative distinction in order to model how absent factors effect things at hand and the other way round. Hereby diverse structures, variations, discrepancies of practices and their contexts can be conceptualized.

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² Fuery 1995: 8
Fuery (1995) calls his system “heterology of absence”. He writes: “Presence is valued, held up, invested with power, and so can be said to have a pervasive quality”\(^3\), whereas and while “absence” functions differently. Though “presence” is supposed to be simply at hand, “absence” is evidently dependent on its status or special shaping. That is to say, something can be “absent” in the sense of being isolated, lost, passed, displaced, suppressed; something can be “absent” in the sense of being indefinite, incomprehensible or uncatchable, etc. Anyway, Fuery works out that not only “presences”, but also “absences” generate, organize, disclose, or modify issues by influencing the qualities of a thing.\(^4\) In our context we regard the shaping or the qualifying notions of “absence” as equivalent to the practical-operative aspects linked with tacit dimensions. Thus, Fuery (1995) unfolds the following four qualifying notions of “absence”:

- The notions of “negation” and “repression” (as Freud or Kristeva put it);
- the signifying order of “négatités” (see Sartre);
- the “absence” as “Aufhebung” or “cancellation” (Derrida) or as the “order of desire” (Lacan);
- “absences” may indicate something that is not said, expressed, present, etc.

There is a more or less definite relationship between certain “absences” and certain “presences”. The notions of “absence” are also qualifying the “presences” at hand.

- To put Fuery’s approach into a scheme:

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\(^3\) Fuery 1995: 1

\(^4\) Fuery 1995: 7
On one hand it is possible that “absence”, as qualified by cancellation, negation, or by repression, is derived from a state of “presence”. Then it is figured as something denied, providing, sheltering, or validating something that is potentially present, or something that is “held-in-readiness”.

On the other hand “absence” can even be the sine qua non of a certain state of “presence”, to think of “négatités” (negations) understood as the outlines of an existent entity (Sartre), as e.g. the outlines of what a phenomenon or somebody is not. “Absence” can also be conceptualised as the condition of a certain state of “presence”, when it covers statū like “unforeseeable”, “spontaneous”, “genuine”, “occurent” (see Derrida), or when it denotes the lack of something causing the desire to be remedied (Lacan). Furthermore, “absences” may explicitly indicate something that is not yet here, something that is excluded, extinguished, omitted etc.

In short, according to Fuery’s hypothesis the fundamental parameters of each concept can principally be traced back to the relation of “absence” and “presence”, respectively to tacit and explicit dimensions presupposed in a theory.

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The Tacit Side of Learning in the Approaches of Meyer-Drawe and Benner

The system of Fuery (1995) will serve as a conceptual ground to unfold the tacit and the explicit dimensions of pedagogy here. With an aim to trace the tacit phenomena and their practical-operative aspects in the phenomenological theory of Käte Meyer-Drawe and in the praxiological approach of Dietrich Benner I will focus on their understanding of the experience of learning and sketch some epistemological and methodological figures in their approaches. Finally I will delineate a critique of their approaches.

Meyer-Drawe (2008) regards the experience of learning as a tacit phenomenon. According to her, learning can only roughly be shaped by referring to its circumstances or to its results. Learning arises spontaneously as a generating, organizing, disclosing, or modifying “absence”. It is an occurrence, whereas its beginning is never obvious. It is not possible to gather or gain acknowledgements, insights and understandings. “Human learning starts with a rejection.”

Like every human experience learning involves multiple disruptions, chiasms, fissures, distances. Meyer-Drawe points out that these diverse gaps in an experience lead to the character of being befallen, confronting a happening to which we become committed without

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5 Meyer-Drawe 2005: 31
being able to help it. The perturbations, irritations and imbalances that are connected to each of our experiences cause a fundamental alienation within ourselves. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, to whom Meyer-Drawe refers, has put it precisely to the point: “One perceives, not I perceive”\textsuperscript{6}. There is something perceived and the origin of a perception is not clear. Meyer-Drawe writes: “Experience is a silver-tongued silence, a reliable and unquestionable belief in the world. Reflection does not start before this belief is shaken and things lose their sense here by regaining new significance. Thinking has to face the genesis of its own sense making.”\textsuperscript{7} This model of experience accentuates the moment of caring for oneself as a part of our conduct of life understood as an effort, not least the effort to catch up with the events of sense-making and to answer to them. Learning is thus situated immediately at a fissure inside the learning subject. It is an inner alienation that enables us to respond to others and to the world, so this line is at the same time an inevitable fault line. According to the phenomenological concept learning is thus based on a blind spot, or better contour in our experiential field. Meyer-Drawe interprets the situation of learning as likewise narcotic, including a kind of agonizing encountering with oneself: as we do not know what we have to learn, unless we already have learnt it, and at the same time we have to realise that we know more than we are able to express.\textsuperscript{8} In a learning process former knowledge is to be rejected, alien features invade into familiar contexts.

Anyway, after we have learnt something, then, for a sudden, things are making sense in a kind of archaic and persistent way, as if this sense had been there forever.

- To put Meyer-Drawe’s approach into a scheme:

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{scheme.png}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{6}Merleau-Ponty 1966: 253
\textsuperscript{7}Meyer-Drawe 2005: 117 (translated by the author); in German: „Erfahrung fungiert als beredtes Schweigen. Sie bedeutet einen verlässlichen und fraglosen Glauben an die Welt. Erst wenn dieser verletzt wird, setzt Reflexion ein, und alles verliert seinen Sinn, um dadurch seine Bedeutung zurückzugewinnen. Das Denken muss sich dergestalt der Genese seines eigenen Sinns stellen. Dem Sein muss Sinn nun abgerungen werden.“
\textsuperscript{8}Meyer-Drawe 2005: 190 cites Polanyi 1985
Modeling the approach of Käte Meyer-Drawe

In the process of learning thus diverse conflicts arise inside a person. Nevertheless, learning has to be aspired and wanted - otherwise the awareness as an integral factor of learning would not emerge. - Seen from the just unfolded perspective there might not be any motivation for learning. However, one can stick to one single positive and maybe attractive aspect of it: the inchoative character of an event.9 It is to say: We are not the starting point and not the center of our own learning. „To begin without a beginning is possible as a response: a responding human being is moving something by being moved.“10 Learning has a responsive character, it is responding to former knowledge, to new influences, to others, to inner processes etc. The willingness and the ability to respond in these ways are here regarded as the only possible reference for pedagogy. This leads us to the further interpretation of learning as mainly corporally mediated and managed. Here, the willingness to learn is not modelled as an intention, but as an existential disposition, and at the same time it is a happening. From the phenomenological view, reflection is regarded as a “secondary experience”, ciphered out from the basic pre-reflexive multiplicity of our experiences. That is, finding ourselves in a concrete situation, our effort is to complete it by qualifying it, reconstructing the invisible sides of the situation, realizing the unsaid, as it is revealed, focusing on issues read between the lines, etc. In doing so we recur to our corporally conveyed experiential knowledge and we come back to it, whenever we decide, whether or how something makes sense to us.11 The corporality of learning is the reason for its tacit- and forgetfulness.

Also Dietrich Benner (2005) points out the productivity of negative experiences in pedagogical situations. Anyway, in the tradition of the rather positivistic praxeological movement he does not place this negativity inside our experiental field and the process of experiencing as

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9 Meyer-Drawe 2005: 155
10 Dörpinghaus 2003: 456 (translated by the author); in German: „Ein Anfang ohne Anfang ist möglich als Antwort; der Mensch als Antwortender ist ein Beweger, der bewegt wird.“
11 The phenomenological method, the “epoché”, is a possibility to work out how tacit aspects work as indices. At the same time, the “epoché” reveals insights as tacit processes. (Cp. Kraus 2006)
such, but in experiences influencing us, *from outside*, so to say. Thus, he speaks of positive and negative experiences, whereas he connotes negative experiences in the context of “Bildung” positively. Knowing and not-knowing, being-competent and not-being-competent, being-familiar-with and being-bewildered, or being-irritated can arise. So Benner characterises learning as a quest, or search as a learning process that starts not at least in a kind of no man´s land: in the disappointment of a certain previous knowledge.12

- To put Benner´s approach into a scheme:

Modeling the approach of Dietrich Benner

To better grasp the praxeological approach of Benner, I refer to Georg Breidenstein (2008) who writes about praxeology as a specific empirical approach: „The social dimensions in praxeological approaches are not any more, as in classical theories of action, assumed as and located in normative orientations. Neither are they - as in rational choice-approaches - figured out as decisions of the acting persons. Social dimensions are supposed to unfold in everyday-practices that are ruled by practical knowledge and practical abilities. That is to say a practice is the smallest element of the social world; it is a routinized `nexus of doings and sayings´ (Schatzki 1996, S.89) coherent by means of implicit practical understanding (stressed by the author). By accentuating practices the viewpoint is disentangled from the acting persons. The question is not who carries out which kind of practice, but in contrary, who or what is involved in a specific practice. Human bodies as well as artifacts are thematized as participants of practices (Hirschauer 2004). Thus, the praxeological perspective insists on the materiality

12 Benner 2005: 12
of happenings: `A practice consists of certain routinized movements and activities of the body’ (Reckwitz 2003, S.290).“
13 Furthermore Breidenstein (2008) points out that the praxeological perspective includes the hypothesis, „[…] that social practices do not arise in of and by themselves, moreover the social world builds up loosely linked complexes of practices“14.

As activities are always imbedded in a social context and balanced out intersubjectively; also practices are connected to socially mediated personal inclinations. Each practice has its conditions in a specific social context. Sociality is conceptualized here as an anthropological fact, generated in dynamic and relational processes. In social practices and contextual structures, orders are transmitted, constituted and created as well as established. The focus lies on corporal, performative and emergent aspects of the practices by which substantiality or reality is generated. The praxeological approach, according to Breidenstein (2008), reconstructs social practices and their effects. This entails the transition from what (happens) to how (reality is constituted), which implicates leaving aside objectivistic claims of truth as well as presumptions about subjective motives.

Analyzing learning process as a constitution of subjective and intersubjective realities and restructuring one´s knowledge, various “absences” come into play: A learning process is accompanied by (socially framed) irritations, neediness, development, change and by other “negative” experiences. In the end the negative experiences and the left-behind-knowledge in a learning process will be forgotten. In a kind of cancellation the crisis inside a learning process is then suddenly and blindly transformed into ability and competence. However, in order to educate or to teach somebody one has to know about the negative experiences in a learning process and also about their continuous cancellation.

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14 Reckwitz 2003: 295
Conclusions

The approach of Meyer-Drawe and that of Dietrich Benner, are both highly reflexive theories for a practical understanding of learning, as they both focus on the process of learning and not only on its results. Further, there are some critical aspects in their theories.

The hypothesis of Meyer-Drawe of a fundamental inner alienation of mankind on one hand leads to a deeper understanding of learning as an in many regards responsive process. On the other hand her approach more or less undermines the possibility to take real existing power structures and their reproduction as the common ground for our practical sense into account (in Fuery’s model this is represented in the notion of “repression”). Thus, there is no dimension of “resistance” or of “being resistant” that is also a phenomenon of “presence” playing a role in pedagogical relationships. Also the possibility of common knowledge or common sense is to a great deal not considered. Furthermore, according to Meyer-Drawe, the psychodynamics of “denial” and “rejection” seemingly do not play a role in a learning process, unless it is figured as oblivion.

Benner points out that there is a confrontation with negativity in all processes of learning and “Bildung” (he uses these terms equivalently), whereas other experiences are much more present, objective, distinct and ruled by knowledge. This is a puzzling, but not rejectable hypothesis. More deeply than the theory of Meyer-Drawe the praxeological approach of Benner takes into account outer social living conditions and common knowledge. Anyway, in both of these approaches there is no obvious possibility to describe processes of repression or such of resistance. Whereas Meyer-Drawe works out responsivity as a general phenomenon with onus on the social embeddedness of our being, the praxeological approach leaves aside this regard along with important tacit dimensions of learning, respectively the responsivity regarding its materiality, spatiality and emotionality etc. Anyway, both approaches show that the analysis of learning as a practice and as a phenomenon brings out the prominent significance of its tacit dimensions.

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