

Teachers Matter
- But How?
October 23-24, 2014



Educational Sciences as a Research on Performative Practices

Anja Kraus, LNU Växjö

The most applied reference sciences in terms of teacher education are certainly Curriculum Studies in the Anglo-American language area, and Didactics in the German-Scandinavian language area. Besides that there is, mostly in the French context, a tendency to strengthen rather the diverse disciplines of domain specific knowledge at the expense of pedagogy. In my contribution I will argue for a perspective on teacher education that came up *within* the Educational Sciences: the practice-approach. In special, I will unfold the performativity-theoretical interpretation of practice-research.

Within Didactics for a long time “Bildung”, that is to say the idea of a personality acquiring knowledge, and, in doing so, developing social and cultural responsibility, has been in the focus of education.

Today moreover all forms of formal and informal learning, also the professional formation of all kinds, are interpreted as a “development of competences” specified as the attainment of practical knowledge. There is thus a kind of paradigm shift, in which the idea of “Bildung” and, with it, Didactics is successively put aside. - I do not agree with this marginalization.

However, I regard neither “Bildung” nor competences as the very core of pedagogy, and thus of teacher education. “Pedagogy is moreover ruled by resp. is practices”. This is my first hypothesis.

This definition of pedagogy is rather simple, obvious and practical, while “Bildung” and the “development of competences” are more theoretical definitions of education.

Practices in the pedagogical fields can be theoretically grasped or described as “Bildung”, or as a “development of competences” etc.

I argue that in the different pedagogical fields “gebildete” *and* “ungebildete” as well as competent *and* incompetent *practices* are of importance. That is to say, e.g. not-learning is, as well as learning, an integral part of pedagogy and should not be forgotten or overshadowed by the presuppositions of “Bildung” or “competences”. One has *to realize not to know* something in order to learn it. This approach to pedagogy is comparable e.g. with the concept of a “negativity of ‘Bildung’” coined by Benner & Englisch in 2005. “Bildung” implies at the first hand manifold experiences of lack.

Benner & Englisch are an exception.

Normally, “Bildung” is a highly normative concept, just stressing the positive side, the desirable outcome of learning: It presupposes the attainment of general knowledge as the very ground and also even guarantee for socially responsible acting. The same is true for the concept of a “development of competences” as it assumes the achievement of applicable skills as being of high, even the highest social value. While the general concepts of “Bildung” and that of a “development of competences” are not only theoretical and rather hypothetical, but also highly normative, that of “practices” is neither the one nor the other.

That is to say, not all the practices we find in the different pedagogical fields are pedagogically desirable. We all know very well, that moreover the contrary is the case. However, practices in the pedagogical fields have a strong tendency to get directed to pedagogically desirable aims: Thus any action in a classroom, like opening the window etc., *may become* normative in a pedagogical field – or it *may not*. The same is true for the actions of the pupils that tend to be regarded in terms of pedagogically desirable behavior, as relevant efforts and as learning, or as its contrary. Whether a single practice unfolds pedagogically desirable potentials, or not, is dependent on all the acting persons in the pedagogical situation.

According to the hypothesis that “pedagogy is ruled by practices”, the prevalent topic of research in the Educational Sciences is thus the diverse practices in the pedagogical

fields. In theoretical regards these practices turn out as “Bildung”, or as something else.

By this the fact gets into sight that theoretical as well as practical pedagogy is on the first hand and fundamentally formed by the theory-practice-relationship structured by and within practices. While there are many possible scientific as well as pedagogical-theoretical interpretations of the relationship of theory, (research) and practices, it is in my opinion not a disadvantage, but a great chance, that practices always already bridge the gap of praxis to theories; “Bildung” and the “development of competences” are different approaches to, or definitions of the theory-practice-relationship - shaped by practices.

Seen from a historical point of view, theories of pedagogy were for a long time on the one hand philosophically, on the other hand practically oriented. An enormous load of normativity is the result. Only recently, that is to say in the last hundred years, pedagogy more and more became a scientific discipline. Normativity did not disappear, as pedagogy always also implies the norm of pedagogical desirability, but, as we have seen, pedagogy cannot be reduced to this norm.

Regarding the normativity of the diverse practices in the pedagogical fields, one has to take into account that they are in general ruled by a whole range of different norms, such as developmental needs, knowledge structures, social expectations, influences of mass media, governmental papers and political ideas etc. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to formulate their very normative frame. Education *in general* does not allow for a uniform theory, as the multifaceted and complex pedagogical reality can hardly be represented by the linearity and coherence of theoretical knowledge. One moreover meets a variety of individual utterances of children and youngsters as well as the professional practices of the pedagogues which bring about different possible interpretations and reactions influencing the self-understanding of the individuals, and also that of the professionals in different ways (the key word here is “phronesis”). In short, in pedagogical practices different objectives of action and heteromorph normative orientations of the acting individuals come into play.

The result of many empirical studies is therefore not at all surprising, that the professional theoretical knowledge appears as fragmentary and sporadic in the pedagogical fields.

Seen as a practice, teaching presupposes the abilities to perceive, to understand and to reflect on creative capabilities as well as the power of judgment. To act reasonably and appropriately in individual cases means to take the factors into account that are relevant for the understanding of a situation at hand. This understanding is, beside other abilities, based on "pedagogical tact" understood by Johann Friedrich Herbart, Herman Nohl or Max van Manen as holding oneself back and waiting or maintaining a certain distance so that a learner may act for him- or herself. This is a special kind of knowing.

The character of this knowing can be described by the performative paradigm that arose in the Cultural and, accordingly, in the Educational Sciences. Christoph Wulf & Jörg Zirfas (2007, p.9) write: "A performative perspective rejects a general and complete method and interpretation of reality in favor of a relativist interpretation fitting to their context and producing a plurality of idiomatic gestures and contextualizing phenomenology." Thus, from the viewpoint of performativity, the genesis, the process character and the consequences of the (visible) events are brought into view; modalities, functions, effects, contexts and contextualization of a thing or an event in a context of practices are of interest. Hans J. Wulff (1998, p.219f.) writes: "In a first step, the performative is defined as an activity that brings up the horizons of meaning by itself"; and Christoph Wulf & Jörg Zirfas (2007, p.18) point out: "Performative realities are *flat realities*, as they focus primarily on the events and their effects, and they are *rich realities*, because they let the events come into view". Performative acts are emergent, they produce situated effects and identified and exemplified themselves. An example of this is Heinrich von Kleists ([1805/6] 1990) „About the gradual formulation of thought during speech“. Only *while* speaking, and not beforehand, meaning, sense and the structures of our orientation come into sight. Another example is the course of a children's "free play". It is not fixed. "Free playing" develops of its own, something is caused within it. In the "free play" the changes of an object are brought about. New ideas and impulses of various kinds come

up. The performative paradigm thus opens up the possibility to overcome the concentration of a science-oriented education on rational, linguistically symbolized knowledge and metrical explanatory models by opening up to diverse cultural modes of teaching and learning.

Georg Breidenstein (2008, p.206) writes about practice-research: "With the accentuation of practices, the view is withdrawn from the *actor*. So it's not about the question of who carries out which practice, but conversely about who or what is *involved* in a specific practice. Human bodies, as well as artifacts are considered as 'participants' of practices." "A practice *consists* of certain routinized movements and activities of the body" Hannah Arendt (1960, p.174) determines action in a similar sense, namely by "[...] placing a thread in a fabric that one did not make oneself." Although, action is certainly started by individuals, it refers to others, to a social structure, where it not only finds its justification and its continuation, but which also helps to determine the mode of action. Action is always tuned intersubjectively and bound to a socially mediated position. Thus, every action has its actual place in a social, it should be said, in a material context.

Let's pay a look at the scientific side: Teacher education is science-based and/or oriented at scientific approaches. This is a common agreement. However, this agreement is, as many other common agreements, not at all easy to cipher out.

My argument is that teacher education needs, so to say, a special kind of scientific approaches. There seems to be a whole range of choice, such as quantitative and qualitative, metrical and hermeneutical scientific approaches in the Humanities. In terms of these approaches there is no "no go" for pedagogy and teacher education.

I moreover propose the epistemological differentiation between the so called "noematic" and the "noetic" approaches in the Humanities. "Noeses" according to Edmund HUSSERL (1968) are thetic acts: like *I say that this is...* Given is a "noema" as the result of sense-giving, thetic acts: *This is a chair*. Alwin DIEMER in science-theoretical regards differs a "noetic" from a "noematic" approach in the Humanities. While the noematic approach focusses on the results of scientific

studies and the method to get them, in the noetic approach the origin of knowledge and insight, of scientific concepts and results as well as the forms of an application of knowledge and insights is worked out. It is based on social conditions, relationships and practices. The sciences are thus not free from normative implications, cp. Longino 2001. The fundamental question “[...] about the significance of [scientific] insights in terms of virulent epistemic, poetical and practical-ethical problems”, as Rüdiger Rhein (2010, p.46) puts it, is in the focus of noetic research. Ulrich Oevermann (2001, p.67) formulates the following critique towards the double structure of rational interpretation patterns: in rational interpretation patterns everyday practice is interpreted on the basis of key concepts as consistencies. Problems that appear as logical inconsistencies, imponderables, contingencies, etc., and they are perceived as different from these key concepts. This brings about that the rational patterns of interpretation “[...] seal effectively against arguments that reveal inconsistencies in these solutions”. A noetic science wants to avoid and reveal such extrapolations by addressing the very far-reaching significance of the imponderable, not controllable and thus, not fully measurable for the human reality. It elaborates ways and means for the theoretical, methodological and methodical consideration of these imponderables and it orients at perspective knowledge, as for example the dependency of knowledge on various forms and formats, and thus a “pluralistic” epistemology (see Bachelard 1974).

Even if we are accustomed to regarding our everyday experiences as determined by a variety of contingencies, the indication that research settings and their results also include contingencies is not quite as catchy. It is still self-evident, that previously secured and approved knowledge can be put in question by new scientific evidence. However, a seemingly valid result can also be undermined by external, discursive or other developments such as substantive or cultural contingencies etc. Research results may turn out to be self-contradictory. However, not only the results, but also the research process may be determined by contingencies. In this way unpredictably occurring changes can for example influence a survey or evaluation situation, unexpected events can influence the progress and results of a study. The methods may not fit to the objects, certain impact factors may not be considered therein etc. In the research field other formats of knowledge than in the research setting may be attained etc.

Noetic research as a self-reflexive research develops methods and settings to work these problems out.

The noetic perspective reflects the fact that educational and teaching practices are mainly determined by diverse, not only by cognitive forms and formats of knowledge. Therefore, and this is the main hypothesis of this contribution, it opens up the possibility not only to analyze the professional reflexivity in terms of educational and teaching practices as well as a perspective to develop this reflexivity within teacher education. Noetic scientific approaches thus seem to be suitable for investigating as well as for structuring the special kind of reflexivity in this professional field.

In terms of a propedeutics of a scientifically reflected formation of experience in this professional field the method of a „performative play” is supposed to link up theories in educational and other human sciences with the everyday practice of the teachers. It thus can serve to initiate a subject-oriented, task- and science-oriented teacher education.