

Andrzej Wierciński

Introduction

Studia Paedagogica Ignatiana. Rocznik Wydziału Pedagogicznego Akademii "Ignatianum" w Krakowie 18, 9-14

2015

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Introduction

This special issue of *Studia Paedagogica Ignatiana*, “Hermeneutics and Education” is dedicated to hermeneutics and education. Hermeneutics shows itself as the practice of *philosophia*, of listening and speaking to oneself, the tradition, and the other. The experience of listening and speaking is crucial for participation in a conversation, which we are. With Hölderlin, we can say that we are not only *in* conversation with one another, but, in fact, we are a conversation already, able to hear and thus learn from the other.¹ As a process of coming to an understanding, conversation requires full involvement from every participant. This means that to engage in a conversation is to open oneself to the other, also oneself as the other, in order to understand what is said. The centrality of *understanding of what is said* rather than of *understanding the person* helps to recognize that “the task of hermeneutics is to clarify this miracle of understanding, which is not a mysterious communion of souls, but sharing in a common meaning”.² This engagement is a call for undergoing a change, for readiness to accept that the other *might* be right and, thus, to revise one’s own understanding. Willingness to change one’s way of being expresses fundamental understanding of being an experienced person

¹ “Viel hat von Morgen an, Seit ein Gespräch wir sind und hören voneinander, Erfahren der Mensch; bald sind wir aber Gesang”. Friedrich Hölderlin, “Friedensfeier”, in: idem, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 2: *Gedichte nach 1800*, ed. F. Beißner, Cotta, Stuttgart 1953, p. 430.

² H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Continuum, New York 2006, p. 292.



as a human being open to new experiences in the face of existing challenges and insights. This openness is essential to a hermeneutic existence; a way of being receptive to alternative interpretations, not as an expression of political correctness or an entertainment of mere diversity (*varietas delectat*) but as a true conviction that by engaging the other in a conversation we produce and not just reproduce meanings. What is most challenging in a conversation is the readiness to move beyond the comfort of one's own familiarity in order to reach new understanding. *Existentia hermeneutica* is a mode of being between familiarity and strangeness. Learning to understand one's own mode of being is a lifelong task, which discloses the necessity and opportunity to grow as a human being while transgressing the boundaries created by our personal, social, and political practices and beliefs. It helps also to overcome the atomization of the contemporary society and calls for solidarity, mutual support, and radical personal responsibility.

Hermeneutics and Education calls for an interpretive approach to education. Understanding of the event of education has a clear educational dimension in the life of the human being. Understanding is not just one of the possible behaviors of a person, but the mode of being of *Dasein* itself. Understanding concerns all our human relations to the world in which we live. Hermeneutic existence, as finite, lingual, and historical, embraces the whole of our experience of the world as thus is constantly being-in-motion of *Dasein* on the way to self-understanding. Understanding as self-understanding is always a formative experience; while informing *Dasein*, it forms *Dasein*'s primordial way of being in the world. Acquiring insights and knowing truth *happens* to us (*ereignet sich*) as we live our life as human beings. To live means to understand and to interpret. Thus, *existentia hermeneutica* is *existentia interpretativa*. Therefore, the main task of our project is to situate hermeneutic praxis of education within the context of general philosophical hermeneutics. The hermeneutics of education is practical philosophy, which reflects upon education as human practice. Hermeneutics is, for us, not a theory or an academic discipline, but the practice of living and thinking together in the context of contemporary challenges in a global and multicultural environment. A comprehensive and insightful thinking about education discloses many difficulties with facing imposed indoctrination and

conformity of many educational systems associated with control of opinions, beliefs, and attitudes. Passive dependent students are easily manipulated and brainwashed. Obsession with details in the transformation of information very often obscures understanding of what needs to be understood and overshadows the joy of real discovery and passionate pursuit for truth.

Education is not about strategy and tactics with regard to the transformation of knowledge. Professional educational tactics might be very efficient, depending on the expectations of the educational systems. However, educational tactics is rather about *tact*, (*tactus*), a way of handling difficult task of education, which involves real touching (Latin *tactus* means touching, from *tangere* to touch). The experience of touching implicates that we are always both, touching the other and are touched by the other. This mutuality reminds us that teaching and learning are not two separate processes, but they occur simultaneously and shape our understanding of what is happening to us when we teach and learn.

The main point in education is to lead educators and students to an understanding that there is something existentially important about education and it cannot be covered by any curriculum but can only be discovered by each and every person as the subject of education. Teaching and learning are life's endeavors. Creative education stimulates learning and discovery and calls for enriching educational experience by talking to others, arguing, and engaging in informal relations in order to counteract the destruction of the richness of opinions and overall diversity, which threatens the legitimacy of many educational systems. Education is about interaction between students and teachers, which encourages independent and critical thinking and greatly amplifies human life.

The hermeneutics of education thematizes the event (*Ereignis*) of education. Education is a way of being within the horizon, which embraces everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. It calls for continuous engaging of new experiences, which contributes to widening of our perspectives and to seeing clearer within the broader horizon. As Gadamer reminds us, "the horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons



change for a person who is moving".³ To understand this change is one of the difficult tasks of education. If *educare* means bringing up, then the privileged mode of this experience is an encounter with the other, both, in the sense of engaging the other person or the other event. And this engagement occurs in the fusion of historically contingent and socially constructed horizons, in need of constant revision and open to multiple, novel, and even contradictory interpretations.

The genuine form of learning is learning through experience, πάθει μάθος. Personal experience is the genesis of education. In Gadamer's reading of Aeschylus, human beings discover through suffering the limitations of humanity and experience the essential divide between the human and the divine. What we learn through experience is an insight into our finitude and historicity. By embracing our finitude, we come to terms with our limitations and learn to deal with the limitations of the other.

Discussing specific issues in philosophy and education makes us aware that encountering the other and opening ourselves to different beliefs, habits, and values disclose to us our own way of thinking and unveil our prejudices. It helps us to confront us with ourselves and others by increasing our self-knowledge and enabling personal growth. Education as formation of a human being counteracts the fragmentation and instrumentalization of the processes of learning as merely problem solving techniques. In contemporary education landscape, there is a very little space for creative expression within the humanities. We emphasize expository writing and prioritize transmission of information about *artes liberales* instead of allowing students for engaging great texts of Western civilization. Careful reading of literature can help us to write, read, and understand not only great literary tradition, but ourselves in the world. Literature, and especially poetry, remind us that to understand a text we have to move beyond a temptation of an easy interpretation and engage with the world of a text, which can open a new world for us. Thus, engaging texts helps us to curate a powerful experience through literature. It produces a sort of *locus amoenus*, a pleasant and often idealized place, a refuge, where in comfort and safety we can meet ourselves and others.

³ H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op. cit., p. 304.

T.S. Eliot in “Burnt Norton”, number one of his *Four Quartets* portrays a rose garden representing potential within human existence:

Time present and time past
 Are both perhaps present in time future,
 And time future contained in time past.
 If all time is eternally present
 All time is unredeemable.
 What might have been is an abstraction
 Remaining a perpetual possibility
 Only in a world of speculation.
 What might have been and what has been
 Point to one end, which is always present.
 Footfalls echo in the memory
 Down the passage which we did not take
 Towards the door we never opened
 Into the rose-garden. My words echo
 Thus, in your mind.

But to what purpose
 Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves
 I do not know.

Other echoes
 Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?

A *locus amoenus* with trees, grass, and water is a preferred landscape for the human mind. It is a place of refuge from time and mortality. In “Burnt Norton”, Eliot makes clear that the true refuge can be found only in the order of the universe by understanding Logos and his power for redeeming human beings from everything which prevents them from realizing and living their utmost potential.

Education is not primarily about transferring knowledge by the systematic way of learning but rather a lifelong journey, which leads to personal growth and maturation. In the world, in which we understand ourselves as strangers, hermeneutics calls for an unconditional hospitality and reminds us that being hospitable toward the other, also as the other of oneself, is not a choice to be made after a careful consideration and selection of existing options, but a vocation of a human being. Thus, hermeneutics of hospitality serves as a horizon of thinking about education, which transforms education

from a commodity that can be traded into a way of living. Education as a personally engaging and meaningful experience counteracts the standardized and factory-like schooling, which as a cultural commodity can be easily turned into a blooming business in a global perspective.

The essence of the hermeneutics of education is to open up different possibilities of understanding the event of education and keep them open. Such an understanding of education calls for putting at risk our prejudices and assumptions regarding education. Instead of concentrating on educational structures, we emphasize that the human being is the subject of educational processes. Education concerns the whole human being, who recognizes the value and the meaning of what is taught for one's own life. The most powerful lesson is taught by the life of the teacher. The success of education can be properly measured only with regard to the success in real life of the person taught. To be successful in life means to learn to cope with one's life and thus to live to one's utmost potential.

On behalf of the International Institute for Hermeneutics, I would like to thank all contributors for preparing their papers, which consistently and persuasively address the hermeneutic task of education. They present a wide array of approaches to the event of education by interpreting what is happening to us when we learn even beyond our wanting and doing. (Gadamer) It is, in fact, an interpretation of life as we live it, which comprehends learning as a way of being. This true variety of the styles of thinking can easily create confusion versus providing coherent opinions. However, our intention is not to lead programmatically neither to convergence nor to divergence, but to offer a hermeneutic platform welcoming the richness of different voices without suffocating critical voices that should be heard.

Our special thanks go to Dr. Krzysztof Biel, the Dean of the Department of Education at the Jesuit University Ignatianum for his hospitality, both physical and intellectual. We deeply appreciate his enthusiasm and continuous support with this project. We are grateful for *Studia Paedagogica Ignatiana* for a generous offer to present "Hermeneutics and Education" as a special issue and thus for allowing us to enter into a conversation on the subject matter, which is dear to our heart.