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What Do the Things Show Us? Learning as Displacement

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ABSTRACT

“What do the things show us?” is the prototype of a question in pedagogical contexts, especially in the context of a conventional school lesson. Usually, there is supposed to be a definite answer to this question. This can be the case, when the thing in question is distinct and clear, easy to describe. Moreover, putting this question and expecting a definite answer can also be done with the intention of limiting the spectrum of possible answers. That may serve didactical purposes, or, the primary aim can be to stabilize the existing social power structures.

However, if there are different concepts of the things in question, or these things are difficult to describe, the pole of the object is faced by diverse subjects perceiving one and the same thing differently. Then there is not only one answer to this question. What does this mean for didactics?

In a setting of explorative learning one and the same thing can be investigated from different angles. Displacement is a didactical strategy of explorative learning. Then, the situational context of locations, things and discourses is taken into account in didactical regards: A fact or a thing changes its meaning and significance by being displaced and relocated into another material or discursive context. A certain thing (also word) thus can, like a motor and sensitive to different contexts of life and professional disciplines, sets going a materially founded and discoursively-symbolic process of interpretation.

Key words: didactics, learning, black pedagogy, performativity of things, displacement

1 Exposé

A teacher shows a picture of a cat and asks the 11-years-old pupils in the class how this animal moves. The topic of the lesson is the muscle-skeletal system of quadrupeds. “Musse sleeps in my bed at night!”, “Minou is our neighbours cat, but he often comes to us…”, are the answers of the pupils. Here, the “thing” in question does not mean the same for everybody in the classroom, resp. the “right” answer to the question is constituted by several subjects in different ways.

This is a common experience for all of us. Furthermore, depending on the social situation, the subjects can have varying powers to describe the thing in question. The person asking might be in an advantageous position with the ability to provide others with the power of
defining a matter, or hindering them from doing it. The latter could be realized, if the
subtext of this question provides the asking person with a more or less definite power of
defining the things in question. This is the case especially in asymmetrical social relations, as
it is true for pedagogical situations: the (earnest) question of a person with more social
power may aim at a definite answer to what the “things” “show” us, whereas there are in
fact many possible opinions about it. The possible answers of the persons with less social
power than the asking person may be disregarded, so that they are even more diminished in
their power of defining the things in question. The question then implies that the asking
person will in the end give the answer her-/himself, e.g. in replying: “This thing shows us
this (and nothing else. I am in the position to force you to accept this without any
restrictions.” In this case the lack of definition and the vagueness of the thing in question
may serve as a door to an act of shame and degradation, in which only power relations are
asserted. A mere approval of power relations is not desirable in education. In the end, in
educational contexts it moreover is a misuse of the reference to the “things”.

Therefore, this type of question is actually a sign of the exaggeration of the disciplinary
power of education; in this regard, the teachers-to-be are warned in the course of their
practical professionalization not to use this type of question in school lessons. However, one
never knows how far this prohibition (of the so-called “w-questions”) reaches. In accordance
with this type of question, the functions of qualification, selection and relocation of the school,
the orientation towards the values of effort and, in an increasing manner, towards output
curricula in school prescribe in a schematized way what the “things” (should) tell us (all in a
definite way). The teacher is obliged to represent this force. At the same time, an educational
situation cannot explained differently than that there is always a plurality of “orders of the
things” that have to be adjusted.

This tricky and thorny context will only be touched in the following argumentation. The aim
is to work out to what degree the question of what the “things” in the field of pedagogy
“show” us is already fully expressed by open or closed questions, by questions with a clear
answer, or such questions without one, resp. what else the “things” “show” us. In the end, the
relevance of the “things” in the field of pedagogy might be beyond verbal expression. It will
emerge that by taking this into account, a very fruitful perspective on general didactics is
opened up. Also, consequences for a pedagogical theory of learning can be drawn.

2 The “Order of the Things” as a Critique on Pedagogy

In general, every pedagogical relation is directed to sooner or later surpassing the asymmetric
social relation that is significant for it, in that by pedagogy the learning persons should be
empowered to self-determination and responsibility for themselves, for others and for the
things. The paradox of the striving of pedagogy to render itself superfluous becomes clear in
conventional lessons in school and especially in the question described above: The
characteristic of this kind of teaching is that the teacher seemingly knows the answer. Thus,
the teacher alleges to know what the “things” in question “show” us. In the context of open
questions this position of power is not per se connected to degradation and shame. The
teacher might be able to “show” many opinions about a thing in question and s/he might be
able to prepare the students to explore it by means of didactics. The teacher acts in a
pedagogical-didactically reflected way, that is, s/he keeps in mind being a pedagogical
professional, when s/he accepts and takes into account the diverse interpretations of various subjects and makes this openness understandable to the students. Provided with a professional authority, the teacher is then able to teach the learning persons an understanding of the “things” and their orders and relevance, fostering their capability of judging. In this regard is accentuated that the students should develop their own understanding of the “things” and form their own opinions about them, understanding their relevance.

However, the authority of the pedagogue in a pedagogical situation is always latently at the student’s disposal; and s/he can ad hoc be put to the test. In school, this is not only true for the interactions between the teachers and their students, but also for the strong output-measurements and governance that prescribes on different levels (quality of teaching, school development, efforts of the students etc.) what the things have to show us and what not. At times the teacher might not succeed in getting the students accept her/his professional authority by means of pedagogy and didactics. Then there is the option for him or her to force the students to follow up his or her aims. The question of what the things show us can be used as a means for that. If this question is rigidly asked with this aim in mind, then the aim of pedagogy to render itself superfluous will in the long run lose presence and relevance. Consequently, the asymmetry of the pedagogical relation will be cemented. This cannot be the aim, as pedagogy then would reach a dead end.

The reason for that is obviously not the question itself. As I already pointed out, the question of what the things show us can be put with a high significance in pedagogical regards as well as without any pedagogical significance and purpose. This is dependent upon whether a widening or a narrowing of the gaze on the “things” is intended and expressed; in principle both are part of the question.

However, the imperious reference to a presupposed general “order of the things” as a dead end of pedagogical practice in school also plays a central role in a wider scope, that is to say even in pedagogical theory as such. The argumentation unfolded above thus forms the fundamental signature of the criticism of a theoretical pedagogy starting from a naturally given order. Some of the champions in the history of pedagogy have been blamed for such a postulate. Thus, Jean Jacques Rousseau's programme “back to nature”, that is to say back to the “[...] immediate and perceivable relations of the things to us” (Rousseau, 1993, p.206, translation of the author) beyond social injustices is criticized as controversial and connected to the dreams of a total government (e.g. Bockrath, 2006, p.73ff.). Even more striking, resp. effective in social regards is the critique of the “order of growing” by Moritz Schreber, which has been accused as being only a presupposed “natural order”. Johannes Bilstein (2005, p.128, translation by the author) describes it as an “orthopaedic” and “ortho-psychological” order, “[...] which is without any mercy, therefore providing only little space for the controversies of human existence” and “causing quite a lot of disgust and horror” (ibid.). In the scope of the antiauthoritarian movement, the pedagogical concept of an already given order is seen as a sign for “black pedagogy” (cp. Rutschky, 1993). In relation to this, even very famous pedagogical theorists, e.g. Maria Montessori, are blamed for the concept of an “order of the things”. Montessori speaks of a “prepared environment” which in the end may serve repressive social orders, such as those of a physical, psychical, social and political nature, as in Montessori’s case (cp. Böhm, 2010). One of the sharpest critics of the concept of a pre-stabilized “order of the things” is Michel Foucault. He describes it as so called “tableaus vivants” (Foucault, 1998), which he counts as the most important means of a pedagogy aiming at discipline and restraint. “Tableaus vivants” form a space in which the given variety of the functions and rankings of
the “things” form a clear and well-ordered pattern, according to which the individuals (e.g. by division of labour forcibly) adapt themselves. This order, according to Foucault (1998, p.191), is “[...] the condition for the control of and the making an entity of elements useful : the basis of a microphysics of power that one could call ‘cell formed’ [stressed by M.F.]”. He continues: “Taxonomy is the space of discipline of vital beings” (Foucault, 1998, p.191), the discipline that is meant here only serves for control aiming at the stabilization of the existing social power structures. A pedagogy, which conceptualizes “tableaux vivants”, starting from a certain given order of discipline, does not succeed in following up the pedagogical aim of reducing pedagogy by fostering self-determination and responsibility. The dead end in pedagogical regards, where a teacher ends up striving for an empowerment of his/her own personal authority, is, according to Foucault, attributed to imperative social forces and power structures.

This contribution deals with the question of why the things are easily used for this purpose, which is highly problematic for pedagogy. Of special interest as well is the possibility of modelling the “showing of things” in didactical-pedagogical regards, that is to say, in order to make it possible for pedagogy not to fall into the apparent trap.

3 The “Order of Things” as an Analytical Category

Fundamental to the pedagogical references to a position of power and to the pre-stabilized “order of the things” criticized above is the fact that there is a certain suppression of acting and judging: Not only the material substance, also socio-cultural structures determine the significance and the use of the “things”. In the fields of Sociology and Ethnology, Georg Simmel, Marcel Mauss und Emile Durkheim marked out this fact at the end of the 19th Century. In relation to the pedagogical practice and concepts criticized above there is a fundamental change of the perspective on “what the things show us (in the field of pedagogy)” (cp. Priem et al. 2012, p.9) : Instead of starting from the hypothesis that this question affirms the power relations in the pedagogical-operative fields, or that this question is already answered by the existing power relations, or by the existing normative theoretical framings (e.g. that of a naturally given “order of things”), we put the question in analytical-reflective regards. That is to say, the question is thus how a certain “order of things” comes into play in a certain situation, how it can be conceptualized, also in its effects on social relations.

This change of the perspective also characterizes the critical position of Foucault. He departs from a hypothesis about a certain type of “order of the things” in the field of pedagogy, before proceeding to criticize the effects this order has on social relations. His criticism is made in such a fundamental way that it implies that these effects, for Foucault, significantly discredit pedagogy. One can argue that there are no social relations per se and also no “orders of the things” per se which form social relations in a unifying way. The “order of the things” and its meaning for social relations, e.g. in the relationship of a cleaner to his/her employer is completely different e.g. from the relationship of a medical doctor to his/her patient. The differences are dependent on certain requirements for the acting persons and her/his aims. Such aims and requirements are bound to certain social relations and the “orders of the things” that are relevant to them.

Here, the question of the relevance of the things is put moreover in respect of the aims of pedagogy. The central aim of pedagogy, resp. of a pedagogical relation, is, as already pointed out, to empower a learning person to self-determination and responsibility for her-/himself, for others and for the “things”: That is to say, the topics, the ways of acting and the normative
framework in a pedagogical situation should be taken over and be interpreted by the learning person in an increasingly responsible way. Therefore, the aims of pedagogy and its norms as well as the fact that certain methods of education are to be preferred before others are in the focus of pedagogical concepts. Usually the “orders of the things” are here derived from the theoretical and practical context of educational aims, norms and methods, thus; they follow from it. In a pedagogical concept for education this is expressed as a whole. Practical pedagogy usually refers to such a concept. Owing to the fact that there are many different pedagogical concepts, the “orders of the things” in the pedagogical fields are principally thought of as varying and diverse. It is not possible to argue for a single and valid “order of the things” in the field of pedagogy. The (potential) variability of the “orders of the things” of pedagogy is an expression of the specific character of pedagogy. We will stick to this interpretation.

Anyway, in the fields of pedagogical practice the “things” are usually seen as a “connection of stuff” (“Zeugzusammenhang” cp. Heidegger, 1993, p.352). That is to say, the “things” are usually reduced to their daily use and, in the ideal case, they are handled with reasonable practical care. The “things” then are regarded as in a way functionally autonomous. The special significance of the “things”, such as their substance, their sensual qualities are then (in spite of many arguments against it, cp. Egger & Hackl, 2010) usually merely a means to an end beyond them. In the context of “stuff” it does not become apparent that something is “shown”, made visible, “staged” by a “thing”, e.g. by an artwork, which cannot be experienced in another way. Martin Heidegger (1960, p.33) speaks of a “truth of being”.

In pedagogical fields the “things” are moreover often seen as more or less latent factors of disturbance, and more seldom regarded and used as fetishes (emblems, trophies, fashion etc.). The significance of the “things” for pedagogy, especially for didactics, has, except for the ideological approaches to it (cp. footnote 1), not yet been explicated (cp. Kraus, 2008). If this problem is dealt with, however, it is usually from the perspective of mediality studies and in terms of single implementations of certain “things” in the pedagogical field.

This lack in the field of pedagogical practice is usually hidden by the fact of contradictory educational norms, values and methods: e.g. the aim of self-development is confronted by the need to train self-discipline and the ability to adapt to given requirements. An educational practice can aim at integration or selection, only to mention two of the antinomies ruling the pedagogical practice. In a pedagogical situation, aiming at both at once is usually the case. To deal with such contradictions is characteristic for pedagogues. These are the indispensable (in theories sometimes “forgotten”) antinomies of pedagogy (cp. Winkel, 1988) from which diverse “fields of tensions” derive (cp. Esslinger-Hinz et al. 2008).

2 Pedagogies that are based on an ideological concept are the exception here. Beside the pedagogy of Montessori, also that of Steiner and of Christian approaches to pedagogy should be mentioned, in which there is a reduction of the “things” to a “connection of stuff (“Zeugzusammenhang”). This happens then in reference to others, partially diverse, but in any case more or less pre-stabilized and in this regard pedagogically questionable (s.a.) “orders of the things” by which the “connection of stuff” is overcome. Such pedagogies are to a high and even increasing degree socially attractive, especially in the educated classes (see: www.privatschulen-vergleich.de/informationen/statistiken/privatschueler-in-deutschland.html).

3 The “things” in the pedagogical field are to be ordered, there are too many of them, or there is a lack, they are expensive, they get destroyed, lost, they cause quarrels or envy etc.

4 To describe happenings in school metaphors of theatre are often used; e.g. Hans Rauschenberger (1985) interprets teaching as a mis-en-scene. This could e.g. provide for the idea of a professionalization of the stage settings in school lessons.
In the field of pedagogical practice, it would be too much to expect the pedagogues as well as the students to always deal with the antinomies in an explicit and conscious way. In their everyday practices they moreover often get caught by the controversies in the pedagogical fields. Explicit concepts of education and the “order of the things” it presupposes are here a part of “mixtures and crossings” (cp. Serres, 1998). The antinomies and fields of tension in pedagogy often do not become visible. Moreover, the perception and the pedagogical work on controversies of a theoretical nature unfold to a high degree en passant and tacitly (cp. Bergstedt et al. 2012). Anyway, the reflection on educational norms, values and methods (should) be possible in order to serve the professionals to order their thoughts, to sort out their feelings and to direct their intentions (again and again) to pedagogical aims. A pedagogical concept cannot lay claim to be a perfect ideal in the field of practice. Additionally, it is put to the test here (cp. Winkel, 2002), it is modified, more sharply focused etc.; under certain conditions new “orders of the things” can be taken into account.

The pedagogical importance of the influence of the “things” on our relations to ourselves, to others and to the world is usually much less acknowledged than that of other challenges in the pedagogical fields. On the contrary, the requirements of a society ruled by information, knowledge and effort are seen in their relation to individual learning under conflicting socio-economical and sociocultural conditions, gender and generational differences, or under the social conditions deriving from increasing technical development, urbanization etc. The divergent concept of the “things” described above as “stuff” on the one hand and as provided with a specific kind of significance on the other hand appears simply as a further antinomy in pedagogical contexts, which seems to be systematically disregarded as being against other, probably more important pragmatic challenges (there are some exceptions, see footnote 1).

Not at last, the interpretation of the “things” as a mere “connection of stuff” seems to be fostered by learning theories brought up in the field of cognition psychology (cp. Piaget, 1978), in which the highest aim of learning consists in operational and logical thinking based on verbal resp. symbolical elements and no longer on the “things”.

However, as there is no human existence beyond materiality, we will never succeed in getting rid of the “things”. Moreover, as we meet others and the world as living bodies, that is to say as materiality. Our living body, i.e. our movements, our habits, gestures, etc. “respond” to material and social challenges. Our living body is influenced by our ways of dealing with the “things” and it gets formed by them (cp. Leontjew, 1973, p.292; Holzkamp 1993). Vice versa our living body constitutes values, needs and preferences. This goes so far that our attention is interpreted even as a social “capital”.5 The “things” have an effect upon us and we are forming them. In this regard, our social relations and appreciations play a major role (cp. Stojanov, 2010, p.561). The “showing” character of “things”, our own showing and that of others are in a way the same. This fact is manifest in our special handling of the “things”. Karl Mannheim (1980, p.207) describes the relation of people with one another and with the “things” as a “contagion”: In our confrontation and in our way of dealing with the “things” we enter conjunctive interactional spaces, such as e.g. plural social milieus and traditions. These are characterized by special frames and measures of orientation, ways of acting etc., which are “shown” by the “things” and in our dealing with these “things”, as Arndt-Michael Nohl (2011, p.197) points out in relation to Mannheim’s concept. In this sense,

5 Today one counts viewer ratings, circulations etc. as money; speaking even of an “economy of attention” (cp. Franck 1998).
one may understand the fact that in all cultural phenomena it is most important to be attentive to the place of a “thing” of cultural importance and to the way one deals with them. In our own dealing with the “things” social realities and values become manifest, which are also reproduced by our practices. Besides that, one gets to know the cultural framings and conditions of individual attention or aversion, even of the capability of an individual, or his/her failures etc. Käte Meyer-Drawe (1990) calls the person a “sujet-subject” as one who makes visible the use of the “things”, the interdependency and the relation of individual realities to social and material realities. The antinomy of a worth in itself and the objectifications or functionalization is as well as the one-sided solution to this antinomy in form of repression, domination, control or alienation unfolds in the centre of our subjectivity. Our aims and intentions, not at last our interpretations of pedagogical aims, are then seen in their dependency on our individual managing of this antinomy (in the course of our life).

Beside the antinomies and “orders of things” characterizing pedagogical practices, also regulations, measurements and “orders of the things” far from pedagogy, such as the rules of the working market, new societal technologies, or diverse powerful partial interests, etc. are a major challenge. Through such regulations and orders, often striking side events are brought about which affect a pedagogical situation in a subversive, supplying or modifying way. Therefore, facing massive demographic changes in the industrial countries and other social, e.g. economical, globalized, technological developments, pedagogy is more and more harassed by foreign, non-pedagogical orders. Anyway, for the new concepts of education, certain non-pedagogical tasks (as e.g. the labour market) play such a central, often even predominant role, that the specific character of pedagogy, that is to say, its variable “orders of things”, its antinomies and its high professional ideal are presently in danger of falling behind (cp. Czejkowska, 2010).

In this regard, pedagogical professionalization seems to be increasingly important. If a need for a stronger orientation towards pedagogical concepts arises, it is, however, often ciphered out as an orientation towards educational norms, aims and methods, often linked to material aspects of pedagogy (e.g. PC-equipment and -use, pedagogically framed stays abroad etc.). Concepts of a pre-stabilized “order of the things” in the pedagogical field, the “connection of stuff” in the context of the antinomies of pedagogy and the shift of emphasis to non-pedagogical “orders of the things” in the field of pedagogy are important topics for an exploration of the “things”. A research on “things” could also open up means and ways of pedagogy to pursue its aim to educate individuals in their self-determined and responsible dealings with themselves, with others and with the “things”.

4 Analytical Potentials of the “Things” in the Frame of Heterotopies

We already introduced the change of the perspective on the “things”, according to which their significance and their use is not (pre)determined by their material qualities, but by their socio-cultural significance. This implies that an “order of the things” not only consists of natural objects and their functions, but also of social ones. The hypothesis of a pre-stabilized “order of the things”, e.g. in the sense of “tableaus vivants”, is, according to Foucault, a trap for pedagogy. The social functionalization of the “things”, e.g. their value of use, has been confronted with their worth in itself, which has been pointed out as a desideratum in the field of pedagogy.
Before this background, the question if and the question of how the “things” function as antipodes to a valid order of discipline and not only as its upholders arises. The answer to this question is found in the following, on the ground of didactical resp. theoretical consequences regarding learning and teaching, by which the above described widened perspective on the materiality in the field of pedagogy is further explicated in didactical regards.

Let us come back to Foucault (1990): He describes counter-placings or opposites to a leading culture or valid order of society as heterotopies. He regards heterotopies neither, as one might think, as concepts nor as (naturally given) “things”, but as places which get their significance from discursive practices dealing with “things” and human beings. As examples of heterotopies he mentions bibliothèques and museums. Heterotopies show us how a society or culture is structured and organized (Foucault, 1990, p.43). Also, heterotopies build up spaces that follow their own rules. This is true for museum arrangements, for their orders and accentuations, in which the valid time measures are put into brackets. It is true as well for “things” which are not shown, but anyway reflected (Foucault, 1990, p.44). The documents and artifacts in the archives of the museums might, according to Foucault, form alternative concepts to the valid orders and in the last consequence they could even resist the valid orders (the cultural policy in dictatorial states which aims at barring out these effects, can be taken as a negative proof for this). In museum arrangements the prevalence of a major culture for special “things” is “shown” on one hand. On the other hand, these arrangements unfold beyond the ravages of time, critical potentials against antiquated social and cultural traditions.

In such heterotopies or “other spaces”, as Foucault (1990) calls them, the “things” are indications of powerful social relations and orders of relations, that is to say they are supposed to reveal dominant and suppressed orders and funds of thinking and knowledge as well as of cultural frames for actions and interactions. Therefore the “things” are thought of as a mode of making knowledge visible, resp. to prove it. Their testifying character is not restricted to the usual discourses of power, neither to the processes of objectification, domination, control, alienation and fetishism, etc. With the possibility to look at the “things” as heterotopies, one gets sight of their “power of veto”, e.g. original historical sources prohibit us from daring or allowing for “[...] interpretations which are not authorized, or simply wrong according to source materials. Wrong data, wrong rows of numbers, wrong explanations, wrong motives, wrong analyses of consciousness: all this and even more may be discovered by basic research” (Koselleck, 1977, p.46). The “things” can “show” mistakes of an analysis of certain circumstances. The recourse to a “thing” implicates the possibility to argue against an interpretation that pretends to be right or to show the right thing, but is not true. Such an argument can be directed last but not at least against an occupation and against a dominant and powerful narrowing of the considerations about a “things” (see above).

Here, it is not reasonable why the “discourses of power” (Foucault, 1998) should not be effective. Furthermore, the “power of veto of the things” implies that what is “shown” by ourselves, by others or by the “things” can be distinguished and described. This case (exception) corresponds to the possibility of a definite answer to a closed question (see above).

We are here primarily interested in the revealing character of the “things”, so to say their “truth” in the sense of “showing-us-something”, (see above) which is neither heterogeneous nor the same for everybody.

In this regard a more fundamental way of reading the critical potentials of the “things” is of interest, according to which their (quasi natural) substantiality undermines the dominant social forces and norms, which are structured by discourses: The “things” are supposed to contradict...
the customary discourses (Bal, 2006) and in the end they “[...] act as a brake, divert and complicate the impact of an interpretation.” (Bal, 2006, p.18). Hereby, the non-discursive materiality of practices and their objects come into play, which is not caught by discourses (as e.g. analyses of the work market, etc.). Besides that, this materiality resists forms of pedagogical, social, creative and ethical arbitrariness and non-commitment as well as the pressure that goes along with the powerful acting of a pedagogue, but also with virtual worlds created by new technologies and all kinds of social claims to pedagogy. The “things” are supposed to call us to look at certain, social, cultural and also pedagogical contexts on one hand in a special way and on the other hand from different perspectives. In this regard by means of a “research on the things” one can expect new scientific approaches and forms to develop: “In the process of research they [scil. the “things”] can have a dynamical function, as their exploration requires different contexts.” (König, 2012, p.27, translation by the author)

Thus, the research on “things” in the field of pedagogy makes it possible to reflect critically on educational practices and concepts, which merge into orders of discipline. Such a research is also apt to explore the material contexts of a pedagogical situation and to work out their relevance for this situation. Also, forms of dealing with the antinomies in the pedagogical field can be worked out by exploring and analyzing the ways of dealing with the “things” and their orders. Furthermore, the effects of non-pedagogical orders on pedagogical situations can be described by such a procedure. Not at last the research on “things” in the field of pedagogy is an important complement and at the same time a critical background for the ideals that are fixed by pedagogical and cultural concepts which cannot systematically or socially be put into practice. This branch of research which has only recently come up in the area of pedagogy has been visibly unfolding its promising potentials.

In this contribution, the modeling of learning and teaching and didactical considerations deriving from the possibilities of a “showing” of the “things” are especially considered. After the description of the implications of the “orders of things” for pedagogy we will deal with different forms, qualities and potentials of showing of the “things”.

5 Heterotopies and Displacement as Means of Pedagogy

In the context of concepts of a pedagogy which is oriented at the concepts of culture and education, Klaus Prange (2005) worked out the “structure of showing in education” (“Zeigestruktur der Erziehung”). According to this structure, somebody shows another person something by verbal-discursive or gestural means with the aim of enabling the receiver to explicate this “thing” himself. Here, the “things” serve as a means to a certain end. Effects of material, social, imaginary, corporal and spatial realities are added to the “structure of showing in education”. Such a mode of showing occurs as a “surplus of sense-making” (“sinnerzeugenden Überschusses”) (Bohm, 2007). That is to say, alongside the articulated aspect a multimodal, shadowed and inexpressible surplus of sense-making comes into play. Ludwig Wittgenstein (2001, VI 33ff.) describes such a showing beyond language and verbal explicitness as follows: If somebody shows something to somebody the verbal, performative and pantomimic, that is to say, explicit modes of demonstration are accompanied by a sense-making deriving from the whole situation, such as the space at hand, the mental state of the persons involved in an action, their (hidden) habitus, the special expressive power of the “things”, social aspects etc. In this context Wittgenstein’s notion is important in that one
cannot express fundamental philosophical and religious phenomena, such as the sense of living, with words; at best, one can express them by showing. Such topics are, incidentally, essential for pedagogical contexts and the development of the personality.

In showing, something makes an impact on people, things, and issues, and at the same time modes of responding to it become visible. A person interprets the effects of showing spontaneously for her-/himself as something distinct (that is, one person understands it as an indication, another as a menace etc.). Consciousness is mostly added ex post (cp. Merleau-Ponty, 1986, p.48). It is our body which is exposed to the material, cultural, social and sociological impulses and configurations and at the same time, the body functions as an individual disposition. On the basis of its individual disposition, our body unfolds its own practices of showing, such as e.g. performing, disclosing, accentuating, ordering, adhering, respecting, menacing, giving, etc.

Explicit practices of showing are accompanied by dimensions that are shadowed and implicit. To give an example: By repeating a word we feel the resonance inside our voice, the syllables, the intonation; we also associate analogies of sounds as well as certain imaginary, mostly vague notions. In a similar way, in particular in relation to our experiences with moving and our procedural knowledge, we imitate a movement shown to us. It might be obvious to us that we faded out something in this process. Showing and learning in parts abscends from our access; those are the tacit dimensions of teaching and learning (cp. Bergstedt et al. 2012). Therefore, the question of whether and how something is shown to someone and whether and how someone has learnt something consists of much more than what we can perceive. We are entirely involved in our living and learning as our learning is an aspect of our liveliness resp. of our bodily existence. What is shown partly withdraws from our access. We cannot even fathom or express our living existence; our body is a “point zero” (Merleau-Ponty, 1986, p.314) for us - beyond all theory. “Our body stands for the possibility of an insight and into the world as well as for the denial of a complete ownership of ourselves and the world” (“Unser Leib steht dabei sowohl für die Ermöglichung von Selbst- und Welterkenntnis als auch für die Versagung eines vollständigen Selbstbesitzes”) (Meyer-Drawe, 2008, p.62). In short: One can assume that the effects of pedagogical and didactical actions as well as the effects of the “things” are based upon “showing”. In the case of learning this “showing” is combined with getting an idea of the perceived things by the learning person via impressions, claims, and challenges that bring the learning person to his/her practices of showing, accentuating, structuring, etc. Herewith an answer by the learning person is evoked. In this more or less non-transparent process, which is only accompanied not completely governed by consciousness, in principle the whole spectrum of showing is important.

Regarding the topic of this contribution, the role of the “things” and their orders in learning processes, the question arises whether there is at all something visible in learning.

Without doubt, we perceive single aspects of learning in the sense of single practices as well as of dealing with “things”. Thus, pedagogical practices aiming to support learning are explicit and at hand. Besides the material changes in a setting, the modifications of the “things” with the aim of facilitating learning as well as the material traces of a learning process are also available. Not least can certain results of learning become visible by “attaining visibility” to the learners, e.g. being made manifest as objects of learning (cp. Meyer-Drawe, 2008).

The central aim of pedagogy and didactics to facilitate a deep understanding of the “things” and to educate the learning persons to self-reliant judgement is bound to a “learning of learning”. That is to say, one has to develop one's own concepts and understanding of the
“things” as well as to check the significance of preconcepts and concepts. Regarding our topic, “what the things show”, we are thus facing the aim to work out the ways of dealing with the “thing” in the frame of learning processes as well as to explain the material changes and traces connected with it to the learning persons. Then one has to avoid “Szylla”, the hypothesis of a fixed and narrow “order of the things” in pedagogy, and “Charybdis”, the illusion of a transparency of learning processes. In this regard, one needs a pedagogical-didactical approach, in which especially the material aspects of learning processes are taken into consideration. Out of the broad range of pedagogical approaches (e.g., Dewey, 1930, Holzkamp 1993, Parmentier, 1989, Nohl, 2011) we have chosen the approach of Christiane Brohl (2003), as it seems to be the most compatible with our context.

6 Displacement

Brohl (2003) unfolds the “displacement” as an (art-)didactical strategy and form of learning, as well as a method of art-based research. On the one hand she recurs to Foucault’s interpretation of space and sites as nodal points of disparate discourses, institutional linkages, historical bondings etc. On the other hand she refers to theories of everyday practical acting and to positions of a special branch in art, “Land Art”. Brohl (2008, p.35) writes, “displacement at first describes a spatial relocation of art situated in the institution of the museum and then moved to public spaces. Displacement signifies a change in the understanding of art: The production of art works is replaced by the discursive practices of doing art based on a special location. Moreover, displacement is the special artistic work of the reading of a location by another location, the intuitive relating of materials, information and associations.” Fundamentally, the principle of displacement is based on the reciprocal interpretation of an artwork and its context. Hereby, not so much the “truth of the things” (s.o.) is the matter. Brohl moreover illustrates how art invades and also sometimes intervenes in common discourses and semantic fields by creating heterotopies. In this way new issues can merge into familiarities (vgl, Waldenfels 1999, p.167). Connections between facts can be built that have not been conceivable before. This is not least true for the common utility modes of the “things” that are bound to discourses. Via displacement, these discourses can be clarified and reflected. At the same time, discourses can be put into question and so be changed by other, new forms of use of the “things” and their reasonable foundations (cp. Brohl, 2008).

Seen from the perspective unfolded above that pedagogy, like art, refers to the various “orders of the things”, the theory of learning as a displacement can be generalized in the following way:

Learning can be described as the dislocation of a well-known fact or “thing” into another material or discursive context. By being relocated, the fact or “thing” changes its meaning and significance. This happens not primarily in formal-abstract and logical regards, but in an intuitive relating of materials, information and associations, by which even new “things” or facts may arise. Displacement can be described as a researching learning in the situational context of locations, things and discourses.

A certain “thing” (also word) then like a motor, sensitive to different contexts of life and professional disciplines, sets going a materially founded and discursively-symbolic process of interpretation: For instance, water in the context of different experiences of life and life worlds as well as in scientific disciplines, like biology, chemistry, world economy etc. and their
material manifestations (formularies, specific settings of research, such as the experiment, professional correspondences, journalistic mis-en-scenes etc.) can be understood differently. This can be shown in the “things” themselves (such as water, water craft etc.), in discourses (energy production etc.) and concepts (chemical elements and reactions etc.) connected to them as well as in the interdependencies between these aspects or factors (see above). By using suitable, as a general rule, mostly exemplary materials, a perspective on “things” can be deepened by objectifying them, and also by putting these “things” into writing, giving them a voice, or by staging them, etc. By letting the “thing” traverse different everyday and professional fields of reference, different forms of showing come into play. The “thing” gets materialized in various ways and in connection with different cultural symbolical systems and practices, not least to the diverse practices of showing. As displacement is to a high degree bound to locations and materials, such modes of showing get objectified, at least in parts. Learning can be learnt by reflecting on such a process. Not at last ethical values, such as the dignity of man, the value of animals and “things”, social commitment, friendship, peace, etc. and its opposites come into play in the frame of such materially based learning processes. Then, eventually also the intrinsic value of the “things” becomes visible. “What the things show” escapes from the control (of the teacher). The concept of education and culture is to be bound to the situation and significances of the “things” at hand, and not so much the other way round.

References


Schöningh.