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Abstract

Breaking the isolation

Education and training represent special forms of activities, as do cooperation and the relations which support and contribute to learning. For the last six years I have worked in the current project and had responsibility for developing educational programmes specially designed for people with different types of handicap: the brain-damaged, slow developers with special needs, people with psychological illnesses or with substance abuse, people with a combination of these functional problems and additionally often with serious social difficulties. The theme of education which I will expound here has its praxis in a large social establishment where around 350 with reduced functionality work and follow educational programmes on a daily basis 1). Up to now the project has carried through around 100 individual courses.

This paper will thus focus on experiences gleaned from this praxis and the endeavour to establish and develop a theoretical approach. I will present a selection of the problems whose clarification occupies me on a daily basis.

Three matters of vital importance:

- The users' meaningful contribution
- Reflections from supervision of the tutors attached to the program
- Theoretical signposts

Presentation of a selection:

- An educational program takes shape in a new paradigm
- Education for inclusion, inspired by the social model – breaking down isolation
- Learning as a social activity: cultural-historical psychology
- Cooperative relations: in the workshop with Marx

This abstract is accompanied by a paper in which the individual categories will be expounded.

Notes

1. Den Sociale Virksomhed Saxenhøj [Saxenhoj Social Activity Centre] – Denmark. Founded in 1876 as Workhouse and Lunatic Asylum
2. Educational praxis and curriculum development
3. Position and rights – on access and asymmetrical relations
4. Vygotskijs position and contemporary apprenticeship theory
5. Defining cooperation as the planned collaboration of many towards a common goal

RELATIONS –CENTRAL ISSUES AND COMMON GROUND

This presentation will deal with central issues in the kind of asymmetrical relations which are prominent in our understanding of learning in the particular types of education programs with which we work. Fig. Relations accentuate central issues

Cooperation

1. To start with, the concept of asymmetry implies that the learning subject and the tutor approach the goals which they must have in common from different positions. Common goals resulting from the planned collaboration of many is, as we know, Marx's definition of cooperation. There is thus an endeavour to realize these common goals by means of the special possibilities of cooperation. Seen in from the point of view of the tutor, this involves a reconstruction of the social content, here also in the sense of knowledge-sharing and attention to the processes developed by Vygotskij in elucidating the zone for the subsequent development: in other words, external social processes, including both scaffolding and an understanding of the inner subjective process.

Learning and shared knowledge

2. Secondly, we will establish a starting point for the learning processes which integrate knowledge and experience from the user's perspective. This, first of all, is the very point of departure where the user is always right; and next, it includes insights and forms of work which for many years have been supplied by people with handicaps: possible common knowledge. The social model (in several variants), psychiatric patients' recovery and the concept of democracy, and the demand for inclusion as the most important. The tutor has external knowledge, but the contribution of the users extends beyond externals to their own experience, and thus to the internal aspects.

Thus the asymmetry of the relation works in the favour of the user. The instructor's task is to contribute to qualifying these forms of knowledge to be part of the identity and education project. These are both important categories, also with respect to the programme's subject content, and in this way a far too reductionist view of the content is counteracted. The subject content as outer frame is thus merely part of the overall intrinsic content.

This also means a break with the more ordinary idea of education, in which societal demand is supreme in determining the content. We attempt to make education a personal project, and therefore the content must to some extent also be personal, but not therefore without due weight on the subject content.

Isolation

3. I believe that we find an important trend within the field of handicap education in sections of the German Behindertenpädagogik, where what I shall refer to as the Bremen school has for many years developed the concept of isolation as central and with various meanings; on the one hand structural, social isolation, and on the other self-established isolation. It is also a characteristic trait common to a number of disorders, in which isolation is almost automatically a central problem. When young people with seriously limited functionality say in reply to questioning that they wish to live and be like most people, I think it is a mistake to take it at face value. They have not taken into consideration the common experiences and special requirements for life and education which are sketched out above. So it is not a matter of either/or, but of both/and. The tutor is particularly challenged on this point. But it can hardly be otherwise. The project of breaking isolation demands full and complete participation, and in fact also a type of participation and self-determination in the design of the education which bursts our usual frames. This viewpoint intervenes both in the understanding of communication and the underlying concepts of dialogue, such as friendship and empathy. According to Lisina's definition, interaction and exchange of information must be tools for coordinating and combining efforts to attain a common goal. The meaningfulness of dialogue must reflect more than mutual interest: both empathy and friendship are also part of the

picture. The understanding of cooperation is deepened and, using an expression from Kanitz, becomes a categorical imperative.

The psychology of work

4. Education must lead to work. That is correct, as far as it goes: but it only sheds light on one aspect of education, and, for that matter, one aspect of work. Education (Bildung) as personal formation and education as training are related to such an extent that an unequivocal nomination of work as the aim of education displaces the formative elements which give identity and develop personality. Important areas of the fundamental psychology of work are similarly overlooked. It is naturally important to be able to supply one's needs, to be able support oneself and one's family by earning money. But such phenomena leave under-investigated vital altruistic aspects of work and its psychology, which may be of public utility. Compensatory strategies can be implemented with respect to the external forms (the forms of paid work and one's own needs, for instance), but in our experience not in respect of the special meaning of work, for both the worker and others.

Shared Values

Both in education, and crucially in work, tutor and user have shared aspirations, or else they must be brought to do so. It is a matter of proprietary rights in the production process, from idea, methods, plan and execution to the product or work. At the end of the day it comes down to the important result of proprietary rights becoming community of interests. This perspective is quite significant, not least for its effect of breaking isolation.

Something corresponding to this can be said about content and form. The former has naturally many facets, but is also often the home of the ethical qualities, which, even though it is often presented that way, cannot simply be detached from the requirements of both external and internal form, which is to say the aesthetic. Seen in this way, the learning process also becomes a matter of contributing to the ability to follow the tracks leading to ethical and aesthetic qualities. This isn't only a subjective matter, but there are factors in production and acquisition which must often give way to the banal ethics of usefulness.

Such an approach often breaks with the tutor's own experience of learning and work; but good teaching is not merely a matter of passing on what one has learnt oneself. This point challenges us in our work with special needs education.

Compensatory strategies in the field of special education are therefore not essentially a matter of removing these significant entities: proprietary rights and community of interests
Compensation must contribute to an expansion of proprietary rights and an increasingly significant community of interests.

Our students

Our students share some common traits. The vast majority of them did not find school a good experience. The education system, if they gave it a try, also presented them with many problems, and subsequently the same was the case with work.

A diagnosis isn't of much help, except perhaps in respect to the way society allots funding, but not in an educational perspective. It doesn't matter whether a person has a psychological illness, suffers from arrested development or brain damage, and has also perhaps come down in the world because of addiction. The belief that particular methods are called for by the nature of the disorder is only partially valid in real life. I do not, however, completely ignore the special nature of the disorder, but neither do I see knowing about it as the solution. On the other hand we can also indicate a number of common problems in several other areas, which we devote much attention to: they have little faith in their own experience; scepticism about learning and education which what scanty social network they have helps to confirm; a fragmentary sense of possessing their own history, a focus on suffering – all of which takes up far too much space in their lives and blocks their encounter with a system which wants the best but has its own agenda.

RELATIONS in ongoing educational learning project with isolated people

Work Activity: hand → and then brain
Oneself interested → non profit (public utility)
Dispose → yield
First psychology of work → then social psychology
[paid work: specific conditions and logic; focus on exchange a. own needs]
ENGELSTED (1984)

Profession Idea → production(labour) → product → work(result)
Right of disposal ← dependent on
Care linked to and derived from work and profession
KIRKEBÆK, DUNKER BERTELSEN, BERTELSEN (1992)

Cooperation Cooperation as a categorical imperative
KANT KANITZ (1923) BERTELSEN (2000)

Dialog Meaningful dialogue – friendship - empathy
JANTZEN (1990, 1992)

Communication Interaction between persons – exchange of information in order to coordinate and combine efforts to establish relations and reach common goals
LISINA (1989)

Learning Zone of proximate development – Scaffolding
Situated learning - New apprenticeship
HEGEL VYGOTSKIJ VERESOV (2005) COLE (2003) WENGER a. KVALE (2003)

Participants contribution

- Development of the social models
- The point of recovery
- How to share the psychology of work (labour)
- Common values – ethic and aesthetic

From professions

- Disability as isolation (social and cultural)
- Identity and isolation
- Reconstruction of the social contents in learning
- Learning in the zone of proximate development

The Other Common vs. isolation (disability)
Weakness vs. self administration --> both
Dependence vs. autonomy --> both
Relations --> contribution
Asymmetric relations, but still with a common cause

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