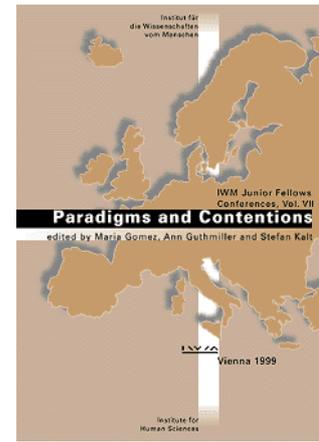


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Eco-Knowledge for the Future or "Interference is the only way to stay realistic."¹ (Heinrich Böll)

Margit Leuthold

In times of change, questions about education and about what humans should learn and know become more and more interesting for public debate. Therefore, discussions about reforming and restructuring pedagogical practices are not simply topics for academics. To varying degrees, what education is concerned with and how it is practiced is determined by politicians, pedagogical establishments, and economists, among others.

The conference in Rome called "Eco-Knowledge for the Future" is an example of this kind of discussion about educational practice. Since the curriculum for the Italian school system was about to be substantially reformed, the conference focused on the need for and ways of including environmental issues in the new curriculum. But new topics for school lessons were not the only themes discussed.

¹ A contribution to the conference: "Towards Gaja - Eco-Saperi per il futuro" which took place at the Centre Congressi Frentani in Rome, Italy from October 30-31, 1998. The conference was supported by Federazione dei Verdi dell'Italia, the Heinrich Böll Foundation, the parliamentary group of the Green Party, and others.

The speakers also considered possibilities for "exchange and interaction between different areas of knowledge"² to better prepare the way for radical transformations of society. Thus, "Eco-Knowledge for the Future" was an effort to describe themes and methods of future knowledge in a "new learning age."

The Heinrich Böll Foundation was a patron of the conference, which can be interpreted as a show of support for this discussion about new approaches to educational practice. The Heinrich Böll Foundation is the foundation for political education in Germany which is closely linked to the Green Party. Because of that affiliation, the Heinrich Böll Foundation is very interested in ecological topics and in organizing debates and discussions which can help further the much-needed ecological transformation of society, politics, and the economy.

In a way very similar to the Declaration of Rio, the aim of the Heinrich Böll Foundation is "sustainable development" with a focus on the ecological, social, and economic needs of present and future generations. Although the GAJA Concept of Knowledge - a concept which refers both to John Lovelock's idea that we understand the body of the earth as a living "mother"-planet and to the didactic advice of Tyler Volk - was mentioned by the organizers of the conference, it is not the leading concept of the Heinrich Böll Foundation. Other organizations which cooperate with the Foundation (in the practice of political or civic education) are influenced by this concept.³

On behalf of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, I presented a specific way of understanding what education can mean. More precisely, what does an education which thematizes ecological topics need to do? In what ways does it involve a political or civic re-education?

Education (*Erziehung/Bildung*), in the German-speaking context, is more than a didactic or pragmatic approach to teaching pupils in school or work in order for them to become functional members of society. Research on educational practices is typically supported by quantitative or qualitative empirical evidence about educational institutions, group-behavior and learning, and teacher-pupil relationships, and has the goal of making the educational system operate better. But deeper

² Compare program-folder "Ecosaperi per il futuro. Riforma della scuola e nuovi percorsi formativi per uno sviluppo sostenibile". Roma, 30/31 Ottobre 1998, Centro Congressi Frentani. Promosso dalla Federazioni dei Verdi con il patrocinio della Fondazione Böll ed il contributo dei Gruppi parlamentari Verdi di Camera e Senato ed il Gruppo dei Verdi al Comune di Roma.

³ F.e. with Schumacher Collge, an international Centre for Ecological Studies in southwest England. The Schumacher College is a department of The Dartington Hall Trust; the Elmhist Centre, Dartington Hall Totnos, Devon TQ9 6EA, U.K.

reflection on the broader meaning and intention of education is necessary. Education is always linked to the more or less Kantian questions: What is the human? What are his/her capacities? What can he/she be? What shall he/she do? Today we direct these Enlightenment questions to new problematics and to different aspects of education. For example, we ask: how can we think about anthropology in a genealogical way? How can we deal with "identity" as an orientation to and within the world (to humans and also to non-humans i.e., to nature and the planet)? How can we become "active"? In other words, how can we use our reason in a reflective way while remaining sensitive to the problems inherent in reason itself?⁴

This leads me to ask: how can we keep educational praxis "open"? A fundamental problem of education itself - one which Kant already began to address - is this pedagogical paradox: How can freedom be taught by force or constraint? In other words: how does one teach people to be free in a disciplined, educational setting?⁵

Today, especially in the context of thinking about ecological, Gaja, or sustainable education, these questions are still relevant: How it is possible to ensure that education is an individual learning process? How can we encourage people to use their own understanding without the guidance of another?⁶ How can we help individuals prepare themselves for the world's needs and not simply produce "well adjusted people"?⁷ How can they begin to ask new questions about new problems and not be reigned in by a given method or a specific form?⁸ How can we teach people to function in society and simultaneously know when and how to criticize it?

⁴ See the discussion in German pädagogical theorie and education philosophie, f.e. MEYER-DRAWE, KATE: Versuch einer Archäologie des pädagogischen Blicks. In: *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, 42. Jg., 1996, Vol. 5, p. 655-664 oder SCHÄFER, ALFRED: Erziehungsphilosophie. In: BERNHARD, ARMIN/ROTHERMEL, LUTZ (Ed.): *Handbuch Kritische Pädagogik*. Eine Einführung in die Erziehungs- und Bildungswissenschaft. Weinheim: Beltz 1997, p. 120-131.

⁵ KANT, IMMANUEL: Über Pädagogik. (1803) In: Ders.: Schriften zur Anthropologie Geschichtsphilosophie, Politik und Pädagogik 2, Werkausgabe XII. Ed. by Wilhelm WEISCHEDEL. 7. Auflage. Frankfurt/ M.: Suhrkamp 1988, p. 691-761.

⁶ KANT, IMMANUEL: Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung? (1783) In: Ders.: Schriften zur Anthropologie Geschichtsphilosophie, Politik und Pädagogik 1, Werkausgabe XI. Ed. by Wilhelm WEISCHEDEL. 9. Auflage. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1991, p. 53-61.

⁷ ADORNO, THEODOR W.: Erziehung - wozu? In: Ders.: *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1972, p. 105-119.

⁸ FOUCAULT, MICHEL: Qu'est-ce que la critique? (critique et Aufklärung). Bulletin des la Société française de Philosophie, Vol. LXXXIV. Paris 1990.

My thesis is that a discussion about the aims which our educational practice should pursue is always linked to questions about what humanity means and what humanity needs. This discussion becomes especially interesting when, in specific socio-cultural constellations, the link between education (as a way of teaching the younger generation) and socialization (as a way of normalizing people to a specific code of living or set of religious beliefs) is no longer clear.

If, in fact, we need not be restricted to a single conception of education or by a single historically continuous pedagogical tradition, might it be possible for us to create different understandings of education and educational practices, informed by different contexts and experiences? To make this clearer, at this point there is a difference between those educational practices which prepare people for "society" and those which teach them about and prepare them for politics. Both must define their aims; both have to be teleological practices.

A third position concerns itself with knowledge which is necessary for educational practice, but is also attuned to "not-knowing,"⁹ i.e., to that which never can be known. One never knows why and when someone begins to think, judge, and act according to his own understanding or why and when someone becomes responsible, in the sense that he begins to care about his environment and the future of humankind.

General education (and here I also mean adult education) is linked to the meaning of Enlightenment and political education (or "civic education," as it is called in some countries). General education seeks to cultivate in people an independent competence to decide and act in situations which are recognizably political ones.

If we take a closer look at the field of politically motivated adult education, as well as at the field of "intermediate organizations,"¹⁰ we can detect a contemporary ambivalence to or ambiguity about modernity. On the one hand, ecological professionals offer a radical critique of the central categories of modern thinking (or Enlightenment thought). On the other hand, some of these categories actually make possible the conditions which are necessary for a new way of thinking and acting. For example, in the environmental or ecological discussion, instrumental

⁹ Comp. WIMMER, MICHÄL: Zerfall des Allgemeinen - Wiederkehr des Singulären. Pädagogische Professionalität und der Wert des Wissens. In: COMBE, ARNO/HELSPER, WERNER (Ed.): *Pädagogische Professionalität*. Untersuchungen zum Typus pädagogischen Handelns. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1996, p. 404-447.

¹⁰ Comp. SELLE, Klaus: Neue Institutionen für die Entwicklung städtischer Quartiere, oder: Warum entstehen intermediäre Organisationen? In: *Forschungsjournal Neue Soziale Bewegungen*, 1992, Vol 2, p. 48-61.

rationality, scientific thinking, and the utilitarian organization of society are considered to be accountable for environmental damage, the erosion of regional decision-structures and ways of living, and the immaturity of citizens. These critics demand that decisions be made by mature citizens who are actively engaged in keeping the future "green." Indeed, they insist that the state or the decision-making authority is morally responsible for the fate of society, and they call for the effective intervention of professional environmental organizations. However, engagement, responsibility, and the capacity for independent decision-making all presuppose the possibility of an enlightened thinker, one who is able to choose on his own, to judge rationally, and to reason reflectively.

This ambiguity also reflects the recent transformations of social and civic movements themselves. I think that the events of 1989 had a decisive influence on these developments. This historic breakdown eradicated the coordinating-system which had organized political thought and action and, correspondingly, critique and acquiescence. Since the main counterpoint to "democratic society" is gone, we must now face the weaknesses and deficiencies of democratic systems. Because anti-communism is no longer a strong affirmation of democratic self-understanding, political education (as a necessary part of a democratic society) is thrown back on itself, back to a meditation on the nature of democratic politics as such.

The Heinrich Böll Foundation practices political education for the purpose of sustainable development. This means that it encourages the discovery of different ways of recognizing or identifying that ecological discourse is a political discourse.

1) The first way of recognizing ecological discourse as a political discourse is to identify its different understandings of basic values. Here, the aim is - to repeat the words of Heinrich Böll - "to interfere" with processes of negotiation.

The basic question concerns which values keep the social planet together. Intellectual values are the material (*physis*), but they are not given to us. They have to be created in a process of negotiation. A concrete example of this is that every summer the Heinrich Böll Foundation sponsors a seminar and conference in Weimar (in cooperation with the Talks of Toblach) about the theme: "More slowly, Less, More beautiful, Better".¹¹ The primary questions include: how can one practice a philosophy of the art of living? How does one live a good life? How can we spread a wider

¹¹ Comp. KOLBMUELLER, Burkhard: Alternativen zum Wachstum in 'Werkstätten konkreter Utopien'. In: NACHRICHTEN. Berlin: Heinrich-Böll-Foundation 3/1998, p. 2. Information about the Conference in Weimar: Langsamer, weniger, besser, schöner - Weimarer Erkundung zur ökologischen Moderne, 25.-27.6.1998.

consciousness of the "wise" subject, one who sees him/herself as a creature living on a planet with different forms of life?

The possibility of seeing the world and one's position in it from both a personal and a global perspective can initiate reflections about the relationship between a personal and a global standpoint. It can help build bridges between different peoples, between humans and other living beings, and between the needs of individuals of future generations and ecological structures. Thus, to practice a good life means to practice a reflective or considered life. By leading such a life, one comes to appreciate his or her capacity to create and empower him/herself, to be able to reflect on his/her relationship to life, body, lifestyle, social, economic, and political behavior, and finally, to the pleasure or joy he/she takes in living.¹²

The answers to these questions are not obvious. They are not simply given; that is to say, we cannot find them just by "looking." They have to be *created* by communication and negotiation. These questions are linked to the Enlightenment questions which I listed before. Here we must ask, what does SAPERE AUDE really mean?

2) The second way to recognize ecological discourse as a political one is to consider different qualifications and strategies of a moderate civil society. The aim is (again borrowing the words of Heinrich Böll) "to interfere" with decision-making processes.

This objective aims at creating political education to prepare individuals to take part in decision-making processes about the best strategies for environmental policy-making. The Heinrich Böll Foundation offers different strategic options. First, the Heinrich Böll Foundation initiated a special forum to bring actual ecological concepts and strategies of sustainable development to public awareness. For example, in August 1998, there was a seminar about "Strategies of Sustainability" in which international decision-makers and academic thinkers took part.¹³ The goal of this seminar was to inform the public about the standards of the actual debate (here, model examples could be presented as well). Second, the Heinrich Böll Foundation cooperates with different organizations and institutions which offer seminars about ecological topics, information, and different approaches/strategies to the topic itself (for example, with Schumacher College, the Wuppertal Institute, and some environmental organizations). Third, the Heinrich

¹² Comp. SCHMID, WILHELM: Zehn-Punkte-Programm fuer einen ökologischen Lebensstil. In: NACHRICHTEN. Berlin: Heinrich Böll Foundation 3/1998, p. 27-28.

¹³ International Conference in Berlin: Strategien nachhaltiger Entwicklung. Umweltplanung im internationalen Vergleich. 29.-30.8.1998.

Böll Foundation tries to interfere with the political decision-process itself by supporting, for example, the campaign for ecological tax reform which is presently being coordinated by different environmental organizations in Germany. In this case, it is very important to get in touch with "real" decision-makers and to enter into political conflicts about environmental policies, such as the issues surrounding the atomic industry, the ecological tax reform, and others.¹⁴

3) The third way to recognize ecological discourse as a political one directly concerns modern society. The goal is to interfere with - moreover, to motivate and encourage others to interfere with - social processes themselves.

This approach is oriented towards an "experiencing" society - a society within which experiences and "happenings" are increasingly needed to feel aware of one's membership in a community. Unfortunately, it is no longer obvious that every individual is a mature citizen who is able to reflect on and discuss common values or who is willing to participate in decision-making processes. To motivate people to enter into a discussion about environmental transformations requires, in effect, to motivate them to become aware of themselves, their environment, and their capacities to reflect, judge, and act. To this end, the Heinrich Böll Foundation offers special seminars - a kind of "edu-tainment" (a combination of entertainment and education) where people can experience themselves and their surroundings (i.e., other people, the group, the place where they live, the natural environment, etc.). In every instance, the focus is on people because people are the objects of the Foundation's efforts. People are encouraged to have "experiences," to have fun, and enjoy themselves in a group. By having some experiences together (for example, by participating in a bicycle tour), and by getting some specific information about the area where they are, people have a chance to understand themselves as persons in a group who need to create relationships among themselves and with the natural world.¹⁵ To encourage them to become interested in what is going on around them and to motivate them to become active citizens in society is the aim of such political education.

In conclusion, the Heinrich Böll Foundation offers us a good example of how it is possible to begin civic education about environmental issues. However, the Foundation must keep in mind that there are a variety of kinds of knowledge which

¹⁴ Comp. HUSTEDT, MICHÄL: Umsteuern fuer Arbeit und Umwelt. In: NACHRICHTEN. Berlin: Heinrich Böll Foundation 3/1998, p. 3-4 (and the common decaration of DNR, BUND, NABU in the following pages).

¹⁵ See f.e. the work of UMDENKEN - Politisches Bildungswerk in Hamburg, part of the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Germany.

are necessary for practice. The Foundation must know where education actually takes place, what the conditions of learning are, and what the goals and the frontiers of every approach are. Finally, it cannot forget that every educational practice must recognize that when and why a person actually starts to think without the guidance of another is something which can never be known. These are the requirements of a future knowledge.