

Introduction

Together with Dr. Małgorzata Przanowska we are guest editors of a special issue of *Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny* on the hermeneutics of education: *Between Hermeneutics and Education: Inspirations, Insights, and Impacts/Między hermeneutyką a edukacją: inspiracje, intuicje, interakcje*. Our task is to offer a hermeneutic voice in a debate on the meaning of education in contemporary society. Hermeneutics of education calls for a radical understanding of education and the radical responsibility for self-education and educating others. Since there is no particular constellation of educational experiences that can embrace the whole of the hermeneutic experience, we cannot but constantly search for a more complex understanding of education.

Education is an event, a happening, ἐνέργεια. It is an enactment (*Vollzug*) of processes we are involved in. Thus, education is a way of being-in-the-world of a human being. This *modus essendi* is always a *modus experiendi* of Being; it is a human openness toward the potentiality of Being and as such a human *Amen*, making what is happening our own and conforming to it by identifying it with our response to the call of Being. If *Bildung* refers to the personal culture resulting from the self-formation, it embraces all culturally significant educational activities developing our talents and capacities as human beings (*l'homme capable*). Thus, *Bildung* as the self-transformation is a formation of the self and expresses the responsibility we have toward ourselves. This formation happens through the experience with the other. Already the word *Bildung*, as Gadamer reminds us, carries in itself the reference to an image (*Bild*); as human beings created in God's likeness we are an image imitating the Creator (*Nachbild*) and have a model to be imitated (*Vorbild*).

Education as an event situates personal encounter in the very center of the educational experience. As in *The Calling of Saint Matthew* by Caravaggio, education begins when people in need meet. A teacher inspires a student to imitation and becomes a life companion. In his masterpiece, Caravaggio depicts the essence of educational encounter as a surprise, a disbelief, and overwhelming joy of being called to follow the teacher. It is an opening toward the unknown, which happens

as the disclosure of truth. Situating this encounter in a deliberate horizon of ambiguity, Caravaggio points toward the relevance of the personal touch, which empowers people who are called to transgress their individual limits and follow the call. In the face of this call, what is asked is an answer, the most personal expression of responsibility (*re-spondeo*). A teacher brings the true light into student's world: The collision of different worlds promises a new way of life. This novelty cannot be imagined and theoretically constructed but must be lived out to its fullest.

Understanding hermeneutics as an educational experience leads to reinterpreting hermeneutics and its possible influence on education. Hermeneutics as the art of understanding is the art of living and shows convincingly that there is no real discrepancy between the theory and praxis of education. Education is the art of leading forth (*educere*), and as such it belongs to the totality of human experience. In drawing forth that which is within, it cannot be separated from the experience of being-in-the-world. Therefore, it encompasses much more than just a way of molding and training (*educare*). It reminds us that equating education with putting in, rather than drawing out misses an essential aspect of education which is nurturing of the holistic development of a human being and encouraging of self-growth, creativity, and integrity. Education is a way of searching for our self-understanding and allows us for rediscovering always anew our enlarged self. Striving for excellence and perseverance in quest for better self-understanding motivate us for a critical reflection on the theory and practice of education, while accepting the elusive nature of this reflection.

Understanding the importance of preservation and passing down of knowledge and the shaping and transforming students call for permanent reinterpretation of the notion of education and educational processes. Since the hermeneutics of education is a practical philosophy, philosophical reflection on the nature of education, i.e., on what is happening to us when we learn cannot be separated from the actual practice of education (*Hermeneutik im Vollzug*). Education prepares us for meeting challenges in our life; it makes us ready to face life as it shows itself and calls for our existential response. It requires questioning, critical thinking, and creative answers to problems yet unknown.

Contemporary education in its focus on educational structures and toxic grading systems presents a challenge for hermeneutics. Interpreting of what is happening in the process of education and what we do when this process is considered successful discloses the complexity of education and the difficulty with the educational systems positioning students as the customers, demanding immediate gratification. Quantitative and empirical research on education has its role in understanding educational practice, especially with regard to securing

measurable outcomes. However, reducing education to the phenomena that can be analyzed by applying the rigor and methodologies of natural sciences does great injustice to understanding education in its complexity and also certain elusiveness to theorization and formalization.

This collaborative project contributes to an understanding of education by offering papers on the variety of topics in hermeneutics and education. Our main goal was to bring together thinkers from different educational backgrounds and experiences to address global educational ethos based on principles of equality, justice, tolerance, sufficiency, and responsibility. We are very happy that colleagues from different Polish academic institutions willingly collaborated with our international partners. Contributors' generosity in sharing their educational experience encourages the discourse on what unites us in our struggle for achieving sustainable development in education in order to change fundamentally the ways we think and act as human beings. The papers on current and recurring issues in education are written from very different perspectives. It is exactly the plurivocity of voices, characteristic for hermeneutic thinking, which opens a space for a productive and critical collaboration. Exploring the ways in which we can use our collective voices while respecting cultural diversity helps us to influence change in educational processes. It brings us into a dialogue, which forms and transforms us and the world we live in by the possible expansion of horizon and the opening up of new horizons.

Education is always a collaborative event. Latin *collaborare* means to labor together (*com-laborare*). Collaboration brings with itself pain and joy of working together as acting and suffering persons. This joint effort happens in the context of our existential experience and opens up new horizons otherwise unattainable for us as individuals and the community. Education is, therefore, a way of inhabiting the world and as such it reveals its fluid spatial and temporal character. Thus, education is an encouragement to give expression to our being-in-the-world as engaged and inspired persons in our pursuit for self-understanding. Our sensitivity to the new and unexpected calls for constant conscious assimilation of what we consider our own and being mindful of our fore-meanings and prejudices. The possibility of a hermeneutic understanding unfolds as the understanding of oneself, oneself as the other, and the others. This understanding happens always in the hermeneutic horizon of responsibility toward oneself and the other. Hermeneutics of education emphasizes transformative character of education: Understanding the other and oneself as the other requires constant revision and alteration of the understanding of oneself. As such, it is the fundamental path to self-formation.

The contributors to this project join me and Dr. Przanowska in thanking *Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny* for the opportunity to address vital aspects of education from the hermeneutic perspective. We would consider ourselves fortunate if our project would inspire our readers to get more sensitive to the growing needs of students and educators in the world that is rapidly changing. Only then will education for the future seriously address the needs of the future.

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