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## THE DEPENDENCE OF THE CHILD AS A VALUE FOR REFLECTION ON PEACE IN LIGHT OF THE CONCEPT OF THE PEDAGOGICAL RELATIONSHIP—INSPIRED BY THE THOUGHT OF MAX VAN MANEN AND LENNART VRIENS

### DOŚWIADCZENIE ZALEŻNOŚCI DZIECKA JAKO WARTOŚĆ DLA REFLEKSJI NAD POKOJEM W ŚWIETLE KONCEPCJI RELACJI PEDAGOGICZNEJ INSPIROWANEJ MYŚLĄ MAXA VAN MANENA ORAZ LENNARTA VRIENSA

**Streszczenie:** Problematyka podjęta w przedstawionej pracy jest ściśle związana z rozwojem idei relacji pedagogicznej, zajmującej szczególnie ważne miejsce w zainteresowaniach badawczych współczesnych przedstawicieli pedagogiki fenomenologicznej na świecie takich jak Max van Manen, Tone Saevi czy Carina Henricsson. Przywołani badacze w szczególnie istotny sposób inspirują się tradycją badawczą tzw. Szkoły w Utrechcie oraz koncepcją „phenomenology of practice”, którą rozwinął uczeń Martinusa Langevelde, Max van Manen. Łączy ich wpływ Emmanuela Levinasa, a rozwijana przez nich koncepcja relacji pedagogicznej w centrum swojej etycznej perspektywy stawia zależność i kruchość dziecka oraz odpowiedzialność dorosłego. Problematyka heteronomii w relacji pedagogicznej odsłania swoje ogromne znaczenie dla rozwijanej w perspektywie fenomenologicznej i egzystencjalnej pedagogicznej problematyki pokoju. Druga część artykułu koncentruje się na kilku inspiracjach płynących z badań Lennarta Vriensa, który prowadził badania nad żywym doświadczeniem dziecka w odniesieniu do wychowania dla pokoju. Wyniki przeprowadzonej analizy wyraźnie wskazują na ogromną potrzebę podejmowania dalszej refleksji nad tym, czym dla dziecka jest doświadczenie pokoju i jakiej wiedzy etyczno-pedagogicznej naprawdę potrzebujemy, by budować pokój. Każdy z nas indywidualnie jako osoba i jako wspólnota.

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**Słowa kluczowe:** heteronomia, pokój, relacja pedagogiczna, Max van Manen, Tone Saevi, Carina Henriksson, Lennart Vriens

**Abstract:** The issues raised in this article are closely related to the development of the idea of pedagogical relationship. This idea occupies a particularly important place in the contemporary research interests of the main representatives of phenomenological pedagogy around the world, such as Max van Manen, Tone Saevi, and Carina Henriksson. Researchers are particularly inspired by the tradition of what is called the Utrecht School and the “phenomenology of practice” that students of Max van Manen and Martinus Langeveld developed, united by the influence of Emmanuel Levinas. Their ethical perspective on the pedagogical relationship places the child’s dependence or fragility and the adult’s responsibility at the center. The issue of heteronomy in the pedagogical relationship reveals its great significance for peace pedagogy developed in a phenomenological and existential perspective. The second part of the article draws upon inspiration from the research of Lennart Vriens on the lived experience of the child in relation to educating for peace. The results of the analysis clearly indicate a great need for further reflection on what peace is for children, and on what ethical and pedagogical knowledge we really need to build peace. This touches each of us individually and as a community.

**Keywords:** heteronomy, peace, pedagogical relation, Max van Manen, Tone Saevi, Carina Henriksson, Lennart Vriens

## Introduction

The issues raised in this article are closely related to the development of the idea of pedagogical relationship. This idea occupies a particularly important place in the contemporary research interests of the main representatives of phenomenological pedagogy around the world, such as Max van Manen, Tone Saevi, or Carina Henriksson. In the hermeneutic-phenomenological and existential perspective these thinkers developed, educational theory and practice both require a sensitive approach to an ever-deeper understanding of the child’s experience. This requires that we embrace reflection on the lives that children lead in a variety of cultural, social, and familial environments. It also points to needs, goals, and spaces for experiencing the world (education and play), as well as the technologies and media that absorb young people and children, to which the modern world “exposes” them. Pedagogical theory and practice, as it were, anticipate the rational (scientifically codified and evaluated), rigorous knowledge that child psychology, sociology, ethnography, and philosophy will develop. As Max van Manen points out, at the heart of this knowledge is the conviction that pedagogy is essentially an ethics-in-relationship. Its basis is the ability to distinguish between what is right and wrong, or appropriate and inappropriate, toward the person entrusted to our care and concern. It is an ethical requirement to know how to act in the best interests of the child before us (Van Manen 2015, p.195). The basis of ethics understood in

this way, in relationship with the child, is the child's dependence and the adult's responsibility.

Thus, the proposed approach points to an interpretive and moral orientation toward the relational dimension of pedagogy, as well as concrete, practical action and reflection on practice and *in practice*. This orientation places the relationship linking teacher and student at the center of the existential dimension of teaching. Otto Bollnow emphasizes that existence is at the heart of the phenomenological understanding of education (Bollnow 1987). This phenomenological and existential dimension of pedagogical reflection opens the door to a pedagogical focus on the educational meaning of life crisis and educational discontinuity. It invites a phenomenological analysis of the phenomenon of crisis, death and dying, security, peace, the person and education, and education as an existential encounter (Saevi 2014, pp. 24–25). Of relevance to the issue at hand, this phenomenological perspective is at the heart of the lived experience of childhood as a pedagogical-critical space for reflection on the contemporary shape of pedagogical and educational practice. The existential and phenomenological qualities of the educational process direct our attention to the experience of care, to the *pathic experience*, to aspects of the child's life experience that relate to suffering. These aspects provide the foundation for the idea of the pedagogical relationship developed by Max van Manen, Tone Saevi, Steven R. Smith, or Carina Henricsson.

In the work of Max van Manen, as in the work of Steven Smith and Tone Saevi (Smith, Saevi 2005), the influence of the thought of Emmanuel Levinas is traceable. His understanding of the category of the Other becomes the framework for the presentation and deep understanding of the concept of the pedagogical relationship from the point of view of the encounter between the "I" of the adult and the "other" of the child. The concept of the pedagogical relationship that these thinkers develop thus places the child's dependence and fragility at the center of its ethical perspective.

### **A relationship in weakness**

With the attempt to restore the humanistic dimension, we begin to consider the teacher as an intermediary between the student and moral/ethical issues—the teacher is an intermediary who uses practical, professional language in this field. Max van Manen's pedagogical thought most clearly reveals its significance when we realize that pedagogy does not have its own advanced moral language. This indeed makes the specific goals and tasks of teaching and understanding education extremely difficult (Van Manen 2000, pp. 319–320). A proven, recognized language of morality in this sphere would allow a teacher to think of his or her daily practice first and foremost as the pedagogical interaction we have, to transcend our "primitive" discourse, to have truly deep conversations, and to teach children the language of morality (Van Manen 2000, pp. 319–320).

It is worth noting here that, in Max van Manen's understanding, this advanced moral language of pedagogy at its root gradually reinvented the categories of the child's care and dependency. The researcher uses the term "pedagogy" to bypass many assumptions and criteria meant to approximate educational issues. Van Manen uses the concept of pedagogy as a key to open the door to other phenomena that form the shape and identity of the modern world of education, such as pedagogical understanding, tact, pedagogical situation, and relationship (Van Manen 2016, pp. 37–38). As he stresses, ethical reflection in pedagogy must be found not in abstract, theoretical discourses and analytical systems, but in the living world, where a newborn is embraced with a look by his mother, where a father calmly stops a child from blindly entering a street intersection, where a teacher winks at a student to confirm that a task has been well done. Pedagogy is not just a word, a name, a concept, or a category. The word pedagogy brings something into existence, calls something into being. It is grounded deeply in the nature of the relationship between adult and child. And in this sense, it is not only defined as a certain kind of relationship or way of doing things, but allows the encounter, relationship, situation, and activity to *be pedagogical* (Van Manen 2016, p. 31). Once again, let's emphasize that what allows it to be pedagogical is the child's dependence and the adult's ethical obligation to respond to it.

What relevance does this have to the task before pedagogy, which is to understand more and more deeply the issue of peace? Pedagogical ethical reflection is meant to help us identify the essence of true childrearing and teaching. It directs us to the inner nature of the child's being and becoming. It directs us to the nature of the values and meaning of teaching and parenting. It is important to remember that pedagogy builds its cognitive attitude toward the object of its interest in a different way than any research field. Van Manen asks, what motivates cognitive interest in the child? (Van Manen 1994, p. 45). In the context under discussion, the issue of peace needs a new language of pedagogy. This, in turn, cannot refer strictly to the technique of teaching, the production of learning objectives, programs, and related competencies. Its source lies in the deep conviction that pedagogy as it is understood today must deal primarily with the personal, relational, and ethical aspects of teaching and educating young people (Van Manen 1994, p. 45).

Let's emphasize again: pedagogy is not just a technique or an approach to teaching. Within its framework we do not speak only about what happens in schools or other educational institutions. Instead, we will find it in the sphere of influence (intentional and unintentional) that a person or group of people exerts on others. And only to that extent is it able to meet the desire for an ever-deeper understanding of the experience of peace and its construction. Following this intuition, we still need support in the process of getting out of a certain impasse. The traditional understanding of moral experience has always been formed in a strong connection with an external source of moral norms, such as ideas of God, goodness, and responsibility to the community and to children—justified and

developed in relation to objectively existing norms and values. In the postmodern perspective, the focus is on what is true and foundational for me in relation to my roots, the originality of my own history, and therefore what only I can discover and express. By clarifying my own history, I am at the same time defining identity and actualizing the individual potential inherent in me (Van Manen 1992, p. 252).

For pedagogy, this would mean that it would remain undeniably self-referential. The ideal of freedom and autonomy centered on the self carries the expectation that the discovery and expression of our identity will be accompanied by respect for the distinct individual identity of others. However—and herein lies the problem—this does not mean, after all, that we must lose sight of another (higher) level of values, where the content of our values, beliefs, and ethical commitments loses this self-referential point. Such a trend is clearly indicated by Max van Manen. Interest in one's own self is placed at the center, and this defines notions of authenticity and personal autonomy. The content of the norms and meanings to which pedagogy points and refers is not to be found in the narrative search for authenticity and self-actualization. This is because the meaning of pedagogy is not hidden in relation to personal autonomy; its source is heteronomy (Van Manen 1992, p. 254).

Van Manen stresses that the concept of heteronomy describes something that goes far beyond the principles of authenticity and autonomy that are defined today. Beyond this, even as the educator is invited to write his or her own story, the voices that remain quiet are those of children. The child's dependence, with which adult responsibility is inherent, lies at the heart of our relationship with the child we meet, teach, or educate. It relates to the call of this other person, this child, and this is what establishes our personal responsibility. Heteronomy is the other side of autonomy: it means being called by or being dependent on something that comes from outside. This creates a clear contrast with the concept of autonomy understood as "living within one's own rights." We can therefore speak of the child's dependence as being hidden at the very heart of the vocation entrusted to pedagogy (Van Manen 1992, p. 254).

When we frame the question of the pedagogical relationship this way, the problem of reference to external social forces ceases to be a key issue. What comes to the fore is the ethics of the pedagogical relationship as such, and this issue of the "otherness" of the child or young person and his/her vulnerability and sensitivity. Max van Manen has noted with great insight that it is only in the face of ethics, the source of which is the relationship, that this vulnerability of the other becomes a weak point in the armor of the egocentric world (Van Manen 2015, p. 202). In the pedagogical perspective, this weak spot, this vulnerability, is grasped from the point of view of how the adult interprets the child's subjective situation and his intentions directed toward him, to what extent he can respond to a situation that the child or young person is unable to communicate. As an important example of this path of pedagogical thinking inspired by the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas. It is also worth mentioning the work of Tone Saevi and Hauservaag, which asks

the question of how the child is perceived in the adult world in the pedagogical relationship, as “the same” or as the Other? The answer is clear: our challenge, as adults and pedagogues, is to become more attentive to the child’s experience and to recognize the child’s total otherness. This is precisely the necessary condition for pedagogical practice in relationship (T. Saevi, H. Hausevaag 2009).

### **Pedagogy and peace**

Learning about and understanding the nature of childhood, which is not infrequently studied from the perspective of sociology or history, clearly indicates the need for pedagogical and phenomenological insights into childhood, into who the child is and what childhood is. For philosophy and theory of education, for reflection on education, the perspective of the child is necessary, though often bypassed. In response to this research need in the development of the European *human science research* tradition, it was undertaken by (among others) what is termed the Utrecht School, one of whose most important representatives was Martinus Langeveld. A contemporary heir is Max van Manen. The Utrecht School is referenced today by the aforementioned researchers, who develop the ideas of pedagogical relations (Levering, Van Manen 2002, p. 283).

For the matter at hand, it is worth noting the work of Lennart Vriens, a researcher also associated with the Utrecht School, who has conducted research on the lived experience of the child in relation to education for peace (Levering, Van Manen 2002, p. 283). Vriens emphasizes that a child’s experience and awareness of war and peace is different from that revealed by adult perception. The question of what the concepts of peace, social discontent, and violence mean to children is necessary to ask, if adult society really wants to confront children and adolescents with these problems. Every child experiences situations that do not originate from peace and do not give birth to peace (Vriens 1984, p. 362). Vriens points to six characteristics for a deeper understanding of the child’s experience:

1. Children are confronted daily with the presence of relationships based on inequality due to the mere fact that they are smaller.
2. Children have a much smaller perspective of power (strength, influence, authority).
3. Their environment (social, but more broadly, the reality that surrounds them) is limited; they are unable to see far away.
4. Children need a sense of security to be able to develop; children have a huge need for security.
5. Children are less independent, less able to handle responsibility.
6. Children are dependent on adults and are in a relationship of inequality with them (Vriens 1984, p. 383).

The analyses conducted strongly emphasize the importance of a particular attitude: people who are prepared and capable of working for peace are capable

and prepared to enter deeply into the problems affecting the world. They exhibit such qualities as emancipation, the capacity for critical judgment, openness to information, solidarity, active availability (to democracy), the ability to defend themselves against manipulation, and being aware of prejudices and superstitions (Vriens 1984, p. 383).

How do we teach and raise a child in a violent and threatening culture that is devoid of a focus on meaning and significance? This question is also an adult's attempt to find answers to his own problems, insecurities, lack of hope and basic trust, or strong fear for the fate of the world and humanity. Education for peace requires deeper insight into the child's knowledge, consciousness, experiences, and feelings connected with peace and war. It is necessary to ask, questions, to discuss the concepts, philosophy, and theory of education, and to direct attention to the feelings that accompany the child's daily experience in this area (Vriens 1984 p. 383).

The question of the continuation of humanity's existence creates a fundamental sense of uncertainty that has a tremendous impact on the upbringing of children. Vriens defines pedagogy as a dialectic between the value of being a child and the task of preparing the child for the future. In a fairly stable society, this preparation is defined more strongly by the present than any vision of the future, as social change is slow. However, we are confronted with a thousand additional dimensions, processes of enormous importance for pedagogy in recent decades. Societies are confronted not only with rapid changes, but with the potential destruction of humanity (Bouver 1989, p. 263).

This coupling of pedagogy and peace for Vriens is an anthropological choice to make living in peace the explicit goal of pedagogy. Therefore, it is necessary to build an anthropology of peace or an anthropology of hope, on which modern pedagogy would find the proper ground for development. This anthropological vision should allow itself to be guided by such criteria as:

- Has the pedagogical dimension of such a future vision been considered?
- Has sufficient emphasis been placed on social (political), humanistic and moral values?
- Is there space in such a vision for alternative viewpoints?
- Are there visible points of contact in the pedagogical reflection present in this vision? (Bouver 1989, pp. 263–264)

The child's development of a relatively harmonious relationship with his parents, the time to experience a proper childhood, the absence of the burden of social problems, and the uncertainty of existence—these determinants of development are constantly confronted with reality, on many levels. Adults' protection of a child's sense of security (guaranteeing this protection), the unquestionable continuation of social life, the value of being a child and living in a world of children that is free from adult concerns, the space to develop, to grow, to experiment—all of this has ceased to exist in recent decades (Bouver 1989, p. 264).

The fears and anxieties of the adult world have invaded and are present in the world of children. Even if not directly, children feel the fears and insecurities of parents, teachers, and peers. We can no longer speak of growing up protected from the anxieties of adult society. Vriens suggests that modern pedagogy has two fundamental tasks:

- a. Encouraging acceptance of the idea that all people share responsibility for the continuation of life on earth and for the societies that make it possible;
- b. Convincing people that raising children means goal-oriented education, or in other words, the meaning of life (Bouver 1989, p. 264).

It is also worth noting that Lennart Vriens, along with a group of other researchers that include Arja Puurula, (University of Helsinki, Finland), Sean Neill, Lisa Vasileiou, Chris Husbands and Peter Lang (University of Warwick, UK), Yaacov J. Katz, Shlomo Romi (Bar-Ilan University, Israel), Isabel Menezes (University of Porto, Portugal), have also developed a research project on attitudes toward emotional education. In the article *Teacher and Student Attitudes to Affective Education: a European collaborative research project*, the researchers show the extent to which the analyses conducted introduce significant aspects into the theoretical understanding of emotional education (Puurula, Neill, Vasileiou, Husbands, Lang, Katz, Romi, Menezes, Vriens 2001, p. 179). They clearly reference the ethics and category of care, understood, however, in an original, separate, authorial way, referring, among other things, to the thought of Max van Manen. How, then, to unveil the meaning of teaching in contemporary discourses in the field of education and professional practice, which is often enmeshed in excessive rationalism, scientism, corporate management style, and strict focus on measurable results, as van Manen wrote (Van Manen 2000, p. 215)? The distinctions drawn between the various traditions attempting to define, explore, and shape the learning process are clear and visible in the metaphors describing the role and experience of the teacher and student: the teacher is an entrepreneur, or service provider. When we put it this way, the student is a customer. Describing the teacher as a leader, we begin to see the student as an employee, and so on. Max van Manen's philosophical position defines the teacher first and foremost as a person who is the source of moral action, defending the concept of pedagogy, and pedagogy as a research discipline and area of professional practice. The most important postulate here is the belief that caring is and should be a key concept in the conversation about teaching at all levels of education (Van Manen 2010, p. 215), care and a sense of responsibility for the relationships we form with others. This is especially so when access to the pedagogical and ethical dimensions of this relationship most profoundly opens awareness of the child's dependence on us—or, to put it another way, awareness of our duty to him. This awareness becomes the source of our humanity and enables an authentic conversation about the meaning of pedagogy and the meaning of peace.



## Conclusion

In the considerations presented, inspiration for pedagogy coming from a deep awareness of the child's dependence which clearly strengthens the sense of responsibility for others. In doing so, pedagogy wants to merge the worlds we share together. Referring to the thought of Emmanuel Levinas, Margaret Polizos Peterson pointed out in her work *The Project of Memory: Life Writing the Holocaust* that responsibility for others, relationship, and communication open a perspective that makes it possible to understand and carry further the discourse of science and philosophy. It is this responsibility that defines the true rationality of the universality of reason. It is the rationality of what can be called the experience of peace (Peterson 2014, p. 103).

In this understanding of responsibility, Levinas sees the purpose of the work we do, the basis of time (the experience of the temporal dimension of our existence) and our own being. Max van Manen describes this perspective as a particular progression in the process of humanization of human life and human institutions. And all this is done to help human beings become reflective and increasingly better equipped to act with full tact in specific situations (Peterson 2014, p.103).

Carina Henricsson, referring to the issue of asymmetry in the adult-child relationship, which is important for the development of contemporary conceptions of the pedagogical relationship, points out that the pedagogical relationship can be described as mutual and, at the same time, asymmetrical. It is the teacher who takes responsibility for the growth of the person entrusted to his care. Knowing about this responsibility, learning about it, is not the same as experiencing it in practice and is quite different from authentically experiencing it. Practicing and experiencing responsibility is the embodiment of nurturing in such a way that each child in the care of an adult can experience the fruits of this adult awareness that good pedagogy is a mutual recognition, a mutual identification, but from an asymmetrical point of view of unequal positions (Henricsson 2012, p. 116). Good pedagogy always points to a movement toward "suspension," transcending this inequality, overcoming the barriers it may raise. Passion and motivation do not arise in this relationship, for the relationship is the motivation and passion (Henricsson 2012, p.119). The pedagogical relationship and the transcending of barriers understood in this way is therefore fundamental to a reflection on the experience of peace that is full of moral and existential meaning.

One final thought: Can adult guilt and the experience of forgiveness taught by a child teach us something important about peacebuilding? What can we do with guilt whose source is the awareness of being an imperfect educator? In his book *Pedagogical Tact*, Max van Manen points out clearly: look carefully at the child's natural ability to forgive. As he points out, this makes our responsibility to him even more significant. We should be—and somehow are—aware of this unconditional forgiveness, which is at the heart of our guilt. As educators, we must always strive

for this value that we have been given by children (Van Manen, 2015, p.194). We must not destroy, break, or deform their ability to forgive. Even when, later, the child's awareness of the adult's downfalls, weaknesses, and limitations is much deeper, the difficult feelings it engenders are met by forgiveness rooted in understanding (Van Manen, 2015, p.194). Teaching is a pedagogical task, the relationship with the teacher also becomes a source of development of the pedagogical relationship understood in this way, and here, too, the problem of forgiveness arises. The most important issue here is the question of how the student experiences the teacher's concern. This pedagogical relationship will be protected by a teacher who takes responsibility for his being in this relationship and actively caring. Belief in the child's individual identity, in his ability to learn and develop, is invaluable here. In the end, however, it is worth staying with this thought: forgiveness has its own pedagogical value. It has the power of restoration, of reestablishing the relationship between child and parent, teacher and student, obligated elder and child. Forgiveness protects and revives this relationship through love and the ability to understand each other's experience.

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