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How to prevent the danger of double violence: religion and worldview in education?

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Abstract

Against the background of a transformative pedagogical view, the author is dealing with Derrida's notion of 'transcendental violence'. This could be a wake-up call for educators and religious educators that their practice is by definition loaded with violence, and to be attentive to this. From a deconstruction as justice stance, practices should consist of both intervention, embodying a danger of violence, and invention, a counterweight that may compensate for the dangerous side of violence. The space that opens itself lies precisely in between the will to govern and a complete lack of interest, and it exists precisely as undecidability. This space is not something that we can completely organize in advance and have 100% control over it. We don't know how and when the invention will happen, who it will be, and how the o/Other will speak and act. It is about creating opportunities for children to come into the world, to respond towards situations and relations, towards societal, communal and religious practices and rites, insights, knowledge, doctrines and narratives, traditions and visions and to develop their own personhood-in-formation.

Key words: transformative pedagogy, transcendental violence, invention, intervention, personhood formation

1. INTRODUCTION

In an earlier publication under the title 'Jacques Derrida's Religion With/Out Religion and the Im/Possibility of Religious Education' Gert Biesta and I have focused on Derrida's theorizing in relationship to religious education. One particular issue in that article with which we only briefly dealt with was Derrida's notion of 'transcendental violence' (Miedema & Biesta, 2004, pp. 28-29). In this article I will relate the notion of Derridean transcendental violence to the topic of religion and education in the (un) making of violence. My first focal point is whether violence is an inescapable aspect of education in general and of religious education in particular. My second focal point is, if

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this is indeed the case, in what way could educators and religious educators prevent the danger or dangers of violence being a pre-condition of education and also of religious education. Leading concepts in this essay are the terms 'intervention' and 'invention'. Theoretically speaking, I will address these questions and the issues of intervention and invention from the background/foreground of the transformative pedagogical view that I have developed during the last two decades.

2. A TRANSFORMATIVE PEDAGOGICAL PARADIGM

Recently I have brought together in a concise way the different aspects of my transformative pedagogical paradigm (Miedema, 2014, pp. 89-92), aiming at personhood formation of children, that is their process of subjectification (Biesta, 2010), or edification (Jackson, 1997). This stance is based on a set of particular publications (Biesta & Miedema, 2002; Miedema, 2012; Miedema & Biesta, 2004; Wardekker & Miedema, 2001a; 2001b). In this pedagogical view there is the visible influence of the pragmatists John Dewey and George Herbert Mead (see this section), but in the background there are also the influences of the critical pedagogy of especially Wolfgang Klafki (1970) and neo-Vygotskian pedagogues like Bert van Oers and Wim Wardekker (Van Oers *et al*., 2008).

This paradigm implies that schools assist children in the double process of socialization and individuation, of becoming competent members of communities of practice. Presentation and representation of information, norms and values must always be seen in the perspective of how children are able to transform this into elements of their own participation, in the process of the formation of their own personhood, their subjectification (Biesta, 2010). This transformation is an active and dynamic process on the part of the child, in which the subject matter –the educational 'stuff'– being the starting point and selected, presented and represented by the teachers, becomes the personal property of the children. The transformation is an activity authored by the children, and necessary for them, in order to acquire their own personhood. In this respect, it is a problem rather than an asset that schools have developed into practices in their own right, separated from the social practices into which they are supposed to introduce children, because learning to participate is best done by participating.

Such a transformative view rests on a conceptualization of how human beings act in the world. The basic image is that of humans as signifiers. Humans in most cases do not make explicit decisions for action based on objective knowledge of the alternatives. Instead, by being bodily in the world and transacting with it, they form images and meanings on which they act. There is thus a continuous interplay between action, signification and reflection. Meanings are never 'objective' but are always the result of the momentary and creative relation between the human being and its environment. Not all transactional relations "ask to be known, and it certainly does not ask leave from thought to exist. But some existences as they are experienced do ask thought to direct them in their course so that they may be ordered and fair and be such as to commend themselves to admiration, approval and appreciation. Knowledge affords the sole means by which this redirection can be effected" (Dewey, 1980, p. 296). So, knowledge is not aimed purely at the continuation of acting as such, but at the problematical in

the broadest sense of the word. And knowledge has a function for other domains of experience too, for example religious or worldview, moral and aesthetic experiences. From this perspective knowledge is "a mode of experiencing things which facilitates control of objects for purposes of non-cognitive experiences" (Dewey, 1980, p. 98).

Defining education in school in terms of participation and transformation, implies that personhood formation, coming-into-the world or being-in-the-world is seen neither as exclusively cognitive nor as individualistic. On the contrary, all domains of human potentiality and ability (be it cognitive, creative, moral, religious, expressive, etc.) –that is, the development of the whole person– should be taken into account by the schools (see also Wardekker & Miedema, 2001a). And 'the formational stuff', brought in by the teachers, but also embodied by the children's peers, should invite children to take responsibility for their self-formation, their self-actualization both from an individual as well from a societal perspective. Transformative pedagogy is never solely dealing with the presentation of knowledge or facts, nor a clear cut technology. It is about creating opportunities for children to respond, to speak, to take stance, to come further into the world or to become aware of their being in the world positively or negatively at knowledge, facts, practices, doctrines, narratives, traditions and visions. And teachers may feel responsible to create in their school classrooms such opportunities for children *in optima forma* to open up.

No human being, however, ever finds herself or himself in a position in which she/he can signify at will, and is then able to coordinate the created meanings with other humans at a later time. Humans are born into a culture, which means that the whole world already has a meaning. Newborn humans have to acquire these meanings in order to be able to participate, and to make their own sense out of the collective cultural meanings in which they are initiated. Most of this acquisition process is not, at least not initially, made explicit (in fact, the ability to 'learn' meanings in an explicit way, as in schools, has to be learned in itself); learning to participate develops by participating in socio-cultural practices. Although no two human beings construct exactly the same life-world, enough of it is shared to make communication and coordination of actions within practices possible. In fact, cultural practices may be interpreted as culturally predefined meaning systems that enable coordinated activities. Such meaning systems encompass interpretations of the world (including other human beings), abilities for interacting with it in order to obtain intended results, values and norms, etc. They are shared by the group of people that engage in the practice, and thus form its associated community of practice. Thus, growing up may be described as acquiring the abilities to participate in practices, or as becoming a competent member of several communities of practice.

The process of socialization, however, presupposes a process of individuation, the process of personhood education, for its necessary reverse side: one cannot become a competent member of a community of practice if one does not contribute at an individual level. This process of individuation rests on the fact that cultural meanings have to be appropriated, transformed into personal sense and thus becoming part of one's own personality. In this process, personal elements like genetic make-up, emotions, and unique experiences gained in past and present circumstances play a significant

role, so that no two persons grow up to have exactly the same personality. This forms the basis of the uniqueness of personhood. It is precisely these uniqueness and these interpersonal differences that make for changes, for renewal in cultural practices. Some of these changes simply occur because of the different views participants bring to the practice; at other times, changes are intended. Ultimately, no practice can stay 'alive' without change; and being able to contribute to changes that are perceived as necessary is a structural element of the competency of participants. This implies that participation is never merely technical, manipulative or instrumental, but always has a normative side, because choices have to be made concerning the direction in which a given practice should develop (see Mead, 1934, pp. 200 ff.). Just like other meanings, the material this normative side is built upon, like goals, ideals and values, comes into being within the context of acting.

This plea for a transformative pedagogical paradigm is not celebrating a monadic or isolated and individualized view on personhood. I have already articulated the relation of individuality and sociality, of socialization and personhood formation. With Gert Biesta, I want to add here another important task of education in schools, the qualification aspect of education, that is providing children, young people and adults "with the knowledge, skills and understandings and often also with the dispositions and forms of judgment that allow them to 'do something' – a 'doing' that can range from the very specific (such as in the case of training for a particular job or profession, or the training of a particular skill or technique to the much more general (such as an introduction to modern culture, or the teaching of life skills, etcetera)" (Biesta, 2010, pp. 19-20). Qualification is and should, as Biesta adequately states, not be restricted to preparation for the world of work, for the labor market and economic development and growth. Knowledge and skills are also important where other domains of life, of formation and personhood are in a more general sense at stake, for instance in respect to political, cultural and religious literacy.

Crucial for this transformative pedagogical paradigm is the view that both the qualification and the socialization aspect of education should be evaluated from their adequate or inadequate contribution to the personhood formation of the children. These aspects are always intertwined. The pedagogical criterion is whether there is a dynamic balance, an equilibrium between the three aspects. Reducing for instance the aim of education only to qualification terms, that is positioning children for the labor market or preparing them for the knowledge-based economy, is reducing both the community of practice (the socialization aspect) as well as the view on the formation of personhood (the subjectification aspect). What is absolutely necessary here is to take a critical-deconstructive stance in the sense of Caputo's notion of deconstruction:

"(T)hings – texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need – do not have definable meanings and determinable missions, that they are always more than any mission would impose, that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy. What is really going on in things, what is really happening, is always to come. Every time you try to stabilize the meaning of a thing, to fix it in its missionary position, the thing itself, if there is anything at all to it, slips away." (Caputo, 1997, p. 31).

The fixation of any of these aspects can lead to essentialist and fixated views on either qualification, socialization or personhood formation, and such views will block forms of dynamic intertwinement, and are a hindrance to a pedagogical and transformative defensible equilibrium. Education and religious education should strengthen the potentialities of social engagement, solidarity, encounter and dialogue.

3. DERRIDA ON 'TRANSCENDENTAL VIOLENCE'

The Derridean notion of 'transcendental violence' has to do, as we have shown in our 2004 article, with the way in which educators and religious educators relate to the otherness of children, to their subjectification or their personhood-in-formation (and this is a life-long developmental process). How can we do justice to them as others, how can we do justice to their otherness and uniqueness? This question goes to the very heart of the matter, not in the least because of Derrida's claim that ultimately deconstruction is justice. For Derrida, justice is always directed to the other; it is, as he has once put it, nothing more and nothing less than 'the relation to the other'. Justice is a concern for the other as other, for the otherness of the other, for an otherness that, by definition, we can neither foresee nor totalize. This presupposes a theoretical stance of a non-essentialist nature implying no fixed meanings in respect to nature or being in the world. If justice is always addressing itself to the *singularity* of the other, we are obliged to keep the unforeseen possibility of the in-coming of the other, the surprise of the invention of the other open. Two perspectives are relevant here: what might come in in the invention, and what and especially who is excluded?

This might be read as an 'anything goes pedagogy' (in classical pedagogical terms coined as 'laissez faire, laissez passer pedagogy'), as if Derrida is advocating that the only way to really do justice to the otherness of the other, to the other as singular being, is to leave the other completely alone. Any intervention, any attempt to name or define the other, to let the other in on our terms, could be seen as a violation of the otherness of the other. But if we leave the other alone, we would precisely block the very possibility for him or her to come into the world, so for invention to happen. This would be utterly unjust. The educational predicament, therefore, is that educators should engage with the child, which we can only do through talking, naming, identifying, presenting, stimulating, confronting, interrupting, et cetera. We need, in other words, to recognize the other; yet such a recognition is always a mis-recognition too and for that reason we could say that it is an act of violence, because "it *presents* the non-representable (the other as other)" (Biesta, 2001, p. 46). And here Derrida refers to this violence as 'transcendental violence' in order to express that the violence of intervening in the life of the children is the very transcendental condition of possibility (and hence at the same time the condition of impossibility) for them to come into the world, to develop the subjectification or their personhood-in-formation. To be concerned and to take responsibility for the coming into the world of the children as unique, singular beings is the ultimate task, the ultimate vocation of educators.

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4. IN BETWEEN INTERVENTION AND INVENTION

Educating, religious and worldview educating and the academic disciples related to these practices are normatively loaded, instead of value neutral or aim-less, or in case of the academic disciplines only taking a descriptive stance towards the domain of education and pedagogy. Crucial is the aspect of intervention or intervening in order to stimulate the development of the subjectification, or to put it differently to support the flourishing of the personhood-in-formation of children. I have outlined the intervention characteristics and the clear aim-directedness of educational and pedagogical practices in my concisely presented transformational pedagogical paradigm above. What we especially can learn from Derrida is that a pedagogy of intervention and intervening (Miedema & Biesta, 2004; Van IJzendoorn & Miedema, 1983), of interruption (Biesta, 2006; 2010) and disruption, is not something that is straightforward, it is not something that can simply be 'done' as a 100% technical action, presupposing a perfect fit between means used to reach a teleological defined aim or end.

Besides, next to the pedagogical practice of intervention, the aspect of the unforeseen, of the invention need to be taken into account too. In education and in religious and worldview education we not only prepare ourselves as educators for the impossible invention, the incalculable coming into the world of the singularity of children, but at the very same time we need to prepare children for the impossible coming into the world, the incalculable invention of the Other. This is not something that we can simply do in a positive way. It is not something that we can organize or arrange in advance, because we do not know how and when the in-coming of the o/Other will happen, who it will be, and how the o/Other will speak and act. It is rather about creating opportunities for children to respond, to take a stance, positively or negatively, towards situations and relations, towards societal, communal and religious practices and rites, doctrines and narratives, traditions and visions.

Both education and religion and worldview can 'use' deconstruction to prevent them from sliding back into the danger of technological approaches which aim to possess and control the o/Other (the child, g/God), threatening the singularity and uniqueness of children. Deconstruction also makes clear that if we want to avoid the possession of and the control over the child, we should not leave the other, the otherness of the o/Other to h/Her or h/His own devices. Within the domains of education and religion we have the duty and the responsibility to speak, to name, to give a name. To be silent or passive here is the ultimate form of injustice, and thus the dangerous or shadow side of transcendental violence, resulting in the making of an anti-pedagogically violence. The space that opens itself in deconstruction lies precisely between the will to govern (possession, technology, control) and a complete lack of interest (not to speak, not to name, no recognition, no acknowledgement, no answers, no reaction). This space is not a kind of compromise, nor just a bit of both; it exists precisely as undecidability.

5. TO CONCLUDE

In this essay I have dealt with the interrelatedness of and the tensions between the two

notions 'intervention' and 'invention' as core concepts positioned within the framework of a transformative pedagogical paradigm. I have described pedagogy, dealing with education and with religious and worldview education, as a normative disciple for which intervention is a necessity and I have contrasted this with what might be named an 'anything goes pedagogy' or what in classical pedagogical terms mostly is coined as 'laissez faire, laissez passer pedagogy'.

In Derrida's notion of 'transcendental violence' the violence of intervening in the life of children is, however, at the same time interpreted as the transcendental condition of possibility for them to come into the world, to develop their subjectification or personhood-in-formation. The very process of intervening is also interpreted as the condition of impossibility, of pedagogically speaking not being able to technically determine the outcome and the aim of pedagogical relations and pedagogical processes. Thus, here intervention is immediately connected with invention. To do justice to the children this presupposes a deconstructive attitude of educators and religious educators. This implies a non-essentialist approach in pedagogy towards education and religious education, and a strong engagement with children to stimulate and foster their coming-into-the world, their subjectification or personhood-in-formation, by talking, naming, identifying, presenting, confronting, interrupting et cetera.

Intervention and invention are two connected sides of the coin within the framework of the transformative pedagogical paradigm. Taking the justice perspective from a deconstructive attitude always seriously implies also the willingness to deal with the questions: "What or who might come in?" and "What or who is (un)consciously excluded in the intervention-and-invention pedagogy?". The transformative pedagogical paradigm offers in my view a fruitful heuristic conceptualization for the equilibrium between a personalized and contextualized interpreted intervention and invention.

So, what I have been arguing for in this essay is that taking into account impossible inventions as anthropological and ontological possibilities next to and in relation with the practices of intervening and intervention, the potential for the unmaking of the possible dangers of the double transcendental violence of religion in education could be created.

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