

There is nothing as practical as good theory?!

Preliminary consideration of historical and recent basics, exemplified by environmental education

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18TH EECERA ANNUAL CONFERENCE
Stavanger, Norway 3rd- 6th September 2008

Significance of ECEC

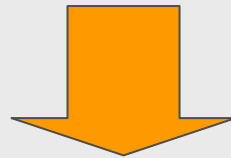
- Significance (individual's life, further development of society)
- Demand for guidelines (parents, early childhood professionals, politicians, and the public)
- Need for scientifically generated knowledge base for ECEC

What works?

- Olson (2004): “... research has little to offer educators... (and) fundamentally cannot offer very much...”
- Separated insights are not connected to each other
- Ambiguous research results leave room for interpretation
- Lack of insights on important aspects of early childhood education

Theories as tools

- Rethink existent research results
- Using theoretical means to illuminate alternative perspectives
- Using interdisciplinary knowledge stocks
- Lack of more complex theoretical approaches



Need of genuine pedagogical knowledge?

“Back to the basics”

- Traditional humanistic German theories of education
- “General Pedagogic” theories
- Problem: only speculative theories

Theories with no empirical basis can point out blind spots in the research scenery

- Three selected concepts: Bildung and Erziehung, education community, practical theories

“Erziehung” and “Bildung”

- “Erziehung” (Brezinka): Children are „necessarily dependent on other human beings“, which try „to improve the structure of their mental dispositions or to keep his as valuable rated features or to prevent the development of dispositions that are rated as bad.“
- “Bildung” (Humboldt): education is based on the free and active development, which means the “self development” or the “self forming”, respectively the “cultivation” of the “inner strength” or the “human nature”. This happens through the confrontation with the manifold world outside, respectively its society and culture. The aim here is the always growing “participation in the truth” or the “rationality”.

„Education community”

- “Erziehung” and “Bildung” are enabled through an education community

The core of this education community is the “pedagogical relation” (Nohl)

- This typical German concept may help better understand the qualities or virtues that are at the heart of “Erziehung” and “Bildung”
- Educationalist is the “lawyer of the child”
- He/she has to understand him-/herself as the “midwife” for the intellectual development of the child

„Practical theories“

Nohl refers to the fact, that the educationalist inevitably gets into conflicts. Because the concepts “Erziehung” and “Bildung” contain a discrepancy between the individual educational needs of the children and the collective educational interests of the society. This discrepancy can only be solved through splitting up the educational problem into its’ pedagogical and social parts. The task of the educationalist then is to identify himself with the pedagogical side and to distance himself from the social side.



Practical knowledge that consists of different integrated (non-discrepant) theory forms: first, second and third order theories

Possibilities and limits

German humanistic education theories



- **Possibilities:** Unveils gaps and inconsistencies between perspectives not congruent with each other
- **Limits:** Speculative approaches are too comprehensive, holistic, abstract, inexact and not empirically proved

First Consequences

- Parents, early childhood professionals, politicians and the public can thoroughly gain fundamental insights if we try to integrate the manifold research results into theoretical frames
- Depending on the sort of frame different aspects will emerge
- Relating to historical basics, mainly inconsistencies will emerge, that weakens or handicaps the early childhood education and care

Environmental Education (1)

Historical roots

Friedrich Fröbel: The core of education is to understand the fundamental differences of **nature** and **intellect** as two phenomena that are mutually conditional

- The highest aim of education is putting them into relation.
- **Affective aims:** “Direct, unadulterated meeting” with the action- and object-manifestation of nature.
- **Cognitive aims:** starting with an affective tinted “presentiment of nature”, resulting in a clear “knowledge about nature”

Environmental Education (2)

Polarization of the curricula

By looking closer at the relevant environmental education curricula it attracts the attention that the polarization in more affective upbringing and more cognitive education aims is still not overcome until today

- **Umwelterziehung** (environmental upbringing): meeting with nature and the so caused love and maintaining-responsibility for nature
- **Umweltbildung** (nature science education): domain specific acquisition of knowledge like in physics, biology, geography...

Environmental Education (3)

Deficits in practical theories

Dominant conception about nature is naturalistic, simplistic, restricted, and enriched with romantic elements

- Hardly a conception of nature's complexity, its multidimensionality, as well as the global and the systemic aspects
- Lack of sufficient nature science concepts
- Unclear commitment to environment...

Outlook

There should be stronger efforts for a **genuine pedagogical view** on ECEC. That means for example:

- We have to conceive the inconsistent knowledge basis of environmental education (curricula, practical theories)
- We have to stop bringing children in a situation of constantly being overtaxed
- We have to be more self skeptic about our own conceptions, like for example the secret, romantic pictures of children, which will highly stylize the children to something they aren't and hopefully they will never be.

Thank you!