

# Why Mollenhauer Matters" A response to Klaus Mollenhauer's book *Forgotten Connections. On Culture and Upbringing*" Translated into English, edited and with an introduction by Norm Friesen

Tone Saevi, NLA University College, Bergen, Norway.

Email: [ts@nla.no](mailto:ts@nla.no)

## Introduction

Why is Mollenhauer significant for education? What pedagogical issues is he concerned with and to what questions can we present concise arguments for the continuing relevance of his thinking today? These are questions intriguing me when trying to write a review on the English translation of Klaus Mollenhauer's book (1983 / 2014) almost 30 years after it was first published in Germany, and several years after the translation of the book into Dutch, Spanish, Norwegian, Japanese and other languages. Mollenhauer himself bases his "rough sketch of what a general study of *Bildung* and upbringing could be today" (p. 9) on the old question of whether it is possible to bring to light some collective pedagogic insights current for today's educational theory and practice. Is there a "basic set of issues that no one who wants to raise and educate a child in a principled manner could ignore, regardless of the position held in our system of education", he asks (p. 6). The book is an attempt to address this particular question. Lars Løvlie writes in the introduction to the Norwegian translation of the book (Mollenhauer, 1996, p. 6) that Mollenhauer purposely seems to keep distance between school and education because schools have become specialized institutions and education has become a branch of science. As a result the threads of upbringing have been gathered in too few hands, and are no longer shared in the common texture of culture. Today's educational practice has forgotten the existential and original aspects of pedagogy, and thus we should start anew in order to understand what education is actually about. To allow us to see what education is truly about, Mollenhauer intends to portray rather than theorize education, and has written a book that is a combination of essays and collage. He addresses six pedagogical-existential issues, each of them at stake in every educational act, and urgently points to reflexive questions significant to adults responsible for the upbringing and education of children and young people.

When living in Canada for professional purposes in 2002 I became aware of some differences between European pedagogy<sup>i</sup> and North American education<sup>ii</sup>, which to me at the time as an outsider were rather striking. While education in North America basically seemed to have a psychological and managerial motivation oriented toward educational success, the European pedagogy as I knew it, had stronger structures of a rather contradictory human existential reflection on what education was and should be, and a certain moral hesitation toward how we as educators influence and socialize the child. North American education was located in schools and other educational

institutions, while pedagogy in the various European cultures that I knew of in practice went on everywhere “in culture”, and thus blurred the boundaries between school and home, home and leisure, school and society.

My broad-pen sketch of some structural differences between education in North America and pedagogy in Europe at that time, opened my eyes not only for the North American idea of education, but perhaps more for the way we understand education, or rather traditionally *used to* understand education in Europe. Upon returning to Norway I realized that education at all levels from kindergarten to higher education had increasingly become more administrative, managerial and product-oriented, not significantly different from any other sector of commercial or economic business, and not very different from education as I had learned to know it in North America. The deep-rooted European tradition of pedagogy was about to die down. The cultural-existential discussion that used to be the point and the end of education, increasingly found solutions in a specialized interdisciplinary and professionally oriented education locked up in educational institutions.

In the last two or three decades education has gradually changed in Europe and Scandinavia. Our politicians have undertaken the North American educational structures, aims and ideas, polished the managerial-oriented rules and regulations of educational practices, and embraced new public management and liberal ideology. Although Norway, like many other countries in Europe, owes a lot to North America and the Allied Forces from the Second World War, many professional pedagogues, teachers and parents realize that not everything that comes from “America” is good. Today, in Norway, a growing number of pedagogues within the professional academic field of education, along with teachers, parents and professionals working with children and young people in public care and on cultural arenas, are critical of the effect-based educational programs implemented in schools by the government. The challenge is basically to humanize and democratize the consequences of the educational management ideology that floods us. The counter-movement is of the opinion that European politicians have traded our traditions of rich plurality and complex indefinite discourses and practices with a world-wide functional and economically based system aiming at educational control and success. Biesta, in his comparative analysis from 2011, seems to confirm that the Anglo-American and the Continental tradition are at least “to a certain degree, incommensurable as they operate at the basis of fundamentally different assumptions and ideas” (p. 176). He argues that while in the English-speaking world education traditionally is seen as an interdisciplinary study and practice, dependent on the academic disciplines of philosophy, history, psychology and sociology, and is not therefore an academic discipline in its own right, the study of education on the Continent “has developed more explicitly as a separate academic discipline with its own forms and traditions of theorizing” (p. 176). Biesta claims that while the identity of Anglo-American educational studies is inter-or multidisciplinary and “based on a particular object of study (education)”, the identity of education, or in German, *Pädagogik*, “is based on a particular value-laden interest” (p. 188). Thus, the questions of education are basically ontological, existential and normative, and directed toward how education might help the child to become human, and in this process become a democratic, free and authoritative person. As Biesta notes, education on the Continent traditionally was not only “confined to the formulation of educational aims, but also encompasses the justification of such aims” (p. 185). A normative and democratic justification of educational aims includes the idea of acting right and good in educational situations. But what is right and good further actualizes a pedagogical concern regarding the

relationship between adult and child, and an interpretive understanding of the relationship in the situatedness of the various educational practices.

Where do I want to go with this? Well, I like to place Klaus Mollenhauer in the European pedagogical tradition that considered and still considers two qualities of life as indispensable: human relationality, in particular the relation between the younger and the older generations, and hermeneutics. Both qualities are thoroughly explored and discussed in meters of books and publications, and traditionally seen and practiced as basic for human and interhuman life and action. We still, in our cultural spine, share the sensation for human relationality and understanding, and perhaps especially so in the aftermath of the culturally traumatic experience of last century's atrocities. We share, as Mollenhauer also remarks (pp. 9, 16), the structures of a priority of human existence and humanity above objects and issues, personal responsibility above social conventionality, and the experiential common moral distinctions between right and wrong, good and evil. The pedagogical relation between the older and the younger generation, the adult and the child, exists for the benefit of the child and is an end in itself.<sup>iii</sup> Today's pedagogical practices in the classroom or at home, often by teachers and parents, are described in relational terms and with personal and moral-laden educational intentions. The effects and outcomes of education were and still are significant, but in situations when the child's humanity is at stake, it is still an issue that humanity should be given priority over educational outcomes. To Mollenhauer, like to many professional pedagogues, "the pedagogical relation can be described as situationally and ethically normative rather than developmentally and socially normative" (Friesen & Saevi, 2010, p. 140). The pedagogical relation, understood as the incarnation and incorporation of life by the adult in a culture, was so basic and taken for granted in the Continental pedagogical tradition that the issue did not have to be mentioned, not by the adult to the child, nor by society to the teacher. This has increasingly changed, in Europe like in the Anglo-American tradition, and therefore Mollenhauer's little book matters more than ever.

As for hermeneutics, interpretation, alternative understandings; the continual interpretation and reinterpretation of texts, actions and life were natural and inevitable in Europe. Interpretation of the practice of education from Wilhelm Dilthey onward was a required part of the *geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik*, because understanding, not explanation, was necessary to distinguish good from not so good practice, and right from wrong educational purposes. The understanding of education as relative and alternative, and thus as a human and cultural activity that requires interpretation, established pedagogy as a discipline "with a hermeneutical structure [that] aimed at the clarification of the aims and ends implicit in the particular educational practices" (Biesta, 2011, p. 186). Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960), commonly seen as a counter-reply to the idea that scientific methods guarantee truth, and to the belief that truth is a methodical result rather than an experiential verdict open to interhuman examination, evolves from the experience of hermeneutics as the structure of human life. The closeness between human existence and the personal human *experience* of existence; interpretation as the experienced reality, go beyond the epistemological concerns of scientific education. Gadamer (1985) considers hermeneutics to be "an attempt to understand what the human sciences truly are, beyond their methodical self-consciousness, and what connects them with the totality of our experience of the world" (p. xiii). Paul Ricoeur (1992), in his book *Oneself as Another*, notes that language and understanding are inscribed in social and cultural practices, and thus language is action and action is given value in language. The human relation between adult and child, teacher and student; the

unnoticed basis of pedagogical activity, like the interpretation of texts, culture and human practices, are the very preconditions of human life and action, both substantiating our experience of meaning and connection.

I think that the reason why Klaus Mollenhauer could write *Forgotten Connections: On Culture and Upbringing*, this “rough sketch of a general pedagogy” (Mollenhauer, 1996, p. 22), is because he took these two preconditions for granted. He trusted that the reader is willing and able to interpret and identify the basic aporetic pedagogical structures expressed with huge complexity, inexactness, and a kind of fictional unacademic style. He wrote in the foreword to the Norwegian translation that the broad cultural material introduced to open up the questions of the book demanded an essayistic form “where dilemmas are tossed forth rather than discussed in thorough detail” (1996, p.8). The new and the old generations were connected personally in culture, history and time, and were best and most adequately addressed from a complex and many-faceted perspective. Hermeneutics was an underlying and tacit ability in every German and European reader, so he trusted that they would understand the book’s basic concern as well as its subtleties, and see the pedagogical meaning of writing such a document. The various translations of the book into other European languages and cultures seem to have admitted the hermeneutic many-layeredness and the fictional-cultural-normative/ideological style of the book. I think an important reason for this is that these qualities were already part of the readers’ cultural tradition and language. The indirect style of Mollenhauer’s book seems to have spoken to the European readers’ experiences as human beings and cultural agents, and thus the resonance of the experiences presented in the book, opened up for contemporary experiences to be interpreted in light of the intertwining of the old and new.

The upcoming translation of the book into English, like the previous translations, consists of Mollenhauer’s six chapters, but also includes a thorough, informative and well-written introduction by Norm Friesen. The six chapters forming the book are: 1. Introduction: What do we talk about when we talk of upbringing?; 2. Presentation: Sharing something about one’s self and ways of life; 3. Representation: Selecting what to convey; 4. *Bildsamkeit*: Trusting that children want to learn; 5. Self-activity: Taking on projects and solving problems; 6. Conclusion: Difficulties with identity.

Following the structure of the book I intend to point out not more than *one question* related to each chapter. I consider this question a particularly significant one and a challenge for today’s educational practice in our Western culture. The questions are based on my experience of studying *Forgotten Connections* and teaching its basic issues at undergraduate and graduate levels to teachers, social educators and art students at universities in Norway and Canada for more than a decade.

### **Translator’s introduction: To the Anglo-American reader**

The translation of the book is in itself an optimistic act, and by writing a thorough introduction for the Anglo-American reader in order to prepare him or her for the book, the translator prepares for something different to come. *Bildung*, the German term for what goes on in upbringing and education, the “way of the self” (Mollenhauer, 1983 / 2014, p. xi), as Mollenhauer puts it, is in itself perhaps the basic example of the precondition of the inherent relationality and the core interpretive understanding of life of the European pedagogical project. *Bildung* as education, self-education, upbringing and self-upbringing, across the borders of personal, private, institutional and cultural spheres as we know them, is presupposed

and deeply intertwined with the human conditionalities of understanding, language, action, morality, relationality, existence and co-existence. Human language falls short when trying to describe or interpret pedagogical action and concerns. I think this, in the first place, is a reason for Mollenhauer's fictional-historical-critical approach. After all, how can one write academically about spiritual-existential human experience and reflection? Mollenhauer considered the confrontation with the intense and self-reflecting paintings of Edvard Munch more important than quite abstract theories of socialization and youth (Mollenhauer, 1996, p. 9). His reference to Herwig Blankertz' manifesto as the motto for his book underlines the same point: "The whole of education, of upbringing, has a meaning that cannot be subsumed to science and scholarship" (Mollenhauer, 2014, p. vii). To Mollenhauer this little book represented a "watershed" in his professional writing, and like many of his pedagogue-colleagues in Germany he wrote *Eine Allgemeine Pädagogik*, a general pedagogy. In this book he fully seems to acknowledge that the insights of tradition, history and culture, and the complex interpretation of the cultural resources of Europe, might mutually influence and change critical-political stances and experiences from the more recent past. Emancipatory pedagogy and critical-political culture, his previous fields of interest, are historical and cultural experiences, and thus as well belong to tradition. Like all cultural movements, they require a fine-tuning or weathering process of time and human reflection to become historically significant.

Klaus Mollenhauer's pedagogical purpose, professionally and personally, seems continually to address the social and political situation in Germany, and in a wider sense, Europe. *Forgotten Connections* was published in 1983, and at that time Europe was the breeding ground of various contradictory politically and socially driven educational views. They were motivated partly by historical Second World War experiences and the Cold War with the Berlin Wall as its ever present bleeding political sore, and partly by historical experiences and sources from outside Europe. The various educational stances taken by professionals, politicians and ordinary citizens, spanning from extreme political and social action to extreme non-action, were Mollenhauer's backdrop for interpreting the purpose of education. In the 1980s, by writing *Vergessene Zusammenhänge*, he did a turnabout and decided to give the child and young person a chance from within their own experiences of life. *Forgotten Connections* is different to its core: essays interpreting fiction, paintings, historical documents and pedagogical descriptions—a mixture of cultural sources, often depicting pedagogical insufficiency and defeat. Mollenhauer practices what one might call an indirect pedagogy by taking detours into all sorts of cultural and historical sources in order to indicate and hint rather than prove, and show rather than tell, what really matters to children. His focus on autonomous *objet d'art*—artifacts like paintings, engravings, historical documents, and "childhood witnesses" presented in works by philosophers, fictional, political and existentialist authors—expresses his cultural and phenomenological attitude to education. All these works of art talk about human existence and thus have the quality of reverberating with our lives. The collage of pedagogical memories recalls childhood experiences in the most diverse ways and manners. Mollenhauer, through his indirect pedagogical way of presenting pedagogical experiences and matters—or what matters to pedagogy, addresses, or comes to address, precisely what goes on between the older and the newer generation. In an everyday detailed and nuanced language he takes one detour after the other in order to explore experiences expressed in philosophy, fiction, painting and pedagogical practice, works that often are located at the margin of the society of their time. He explores six pedagogical phenomena by depicting their core structures, and

the phenomenologist as well as the pedagogue in me, experience that the core structures that he presents definitely belong to the phenomenon of pedagogy; in fact they are qualities that build the essential structure of the phenomenon.

## **Chapter 1 Introduction: Why children?**

Mollenhauer's title to the introduction of his book in German language and in the Norwegian translation is: *What should be talked about?* This title has a stronger normative edge than the title in the English translation, which takes a neutral stance: What are we talking about when we talk of upbringing? It strikes me that this difference indicates the "educational language" in Europe, which naturally speaks from within the existential normativity rather than with a descriptive distance to the matter. Mollenhauer already has set the pace of how to speak of education. Mollenhauer further introduces Kafka's letter to his father and refers to similar historical fictional and artistic works of pedagogical relevance, some of which the translator generously offers full-text versions on the internet for the interested reader. The full-text sources are indeed very helpful also for the European reader of this complex book. What is striking though, is that Mollenhauer's cultural-pedagogical sources are not stories of success. Actually more as a rule than not, they are captivating stories of children's fright, despair and loneliness, and adults' falling short and failing to understand the real meaning of their being and doing in relation to children. The stories describe memories of childhoods, and we immediately sense how children's lives could have been different if the adults who were responsible for them, the circumstances they were born under, and the choices made for them, were different. Mollenhauer remorselessly, just as much to himself as to the reader and the pedagogical culture as such, sketches the deep impossibility of pedagogically good and right actions toward children and young people. The father and mother we all have, or the person bringing us up, all hopefully want the best for us. But what *is* the best? Who decides and how can the best be selected among all the possible and available options? Do I, in fact, know all the options I might have when facing a decisive moment with a child? And how do I know that what I consider to be good today also is good for the child in the future? The fact is, we cannot know. Education and pedagogy could always have been and become different. Mollenhauer asks the most basic of all educational questions: Why do we want to have children? Why children? Without children there is no need for pedagogy. Without children there is no future, literally spoken. The question, along with the fundamental pathlessness to upbringing (p. 5), is Mollenhauer's point of departure. His response to why he wants to have children modestly is that he wants something of that which might be good in his life to continue (p. 8). The complexity of the question and the modest hopefulness in the response, personally and on behalf of the culture, nevertheless is indicative of his aim for the book. Pedagogical theory as well as practice always is and must by necessity be sustained and kept alive by a moral awareness in our common cultural memory, and by reflection and discussion of the aporetic and basically impossible possibility of pedagogy.

## **Chapter 2: Ways of life**

How do children learn? How do they learn from adults, culture, and life, and how is learning related to self and others? In fact, what is learning? Mollenhauer presents a broad interpretation of learning, in which he seems to include the European way of

understanding hermeneutics as a precondition for interpreting existential structures as the ways of life presented to children by the adults in the culture. He, in fact, relates learning to the experience of *who I am*. The experience of who I am, is related to my “I” in relation to self as body, senses, consciousness, and to others, in the immediate and direct way as presentation, and in the indirect way as representations (which he discusses in the next chapter). Here, in chapter 2, the focus is on self-education and on how children actually encounter an expression of the world through their encounter with adults, and the way these adults relate to self, their world, others and to the child. The encounter with others and the world needs to be *slowed down* for the child (p. 21), so that the child can grasp its existential and rational meaning. The *filtered* pedagogical world is a world where adults’ language, actions and objects intend to protect and care for the child, so that an appropriate pedagogical relation can become possible between adult and child. The *filter* is needed exactly because adult and child inhabit the same world, and it is the older generation’s responsibility to help the child understand this world according to his or her human condition. In order to show and convincingly remind the reader of the structures of upbringing in culture, Mollenhauer presents examples of filtered presentation of ways of life. One such example is the little child Long Lance, who incidentally takes part in an Indian attack protected by his mother, and another is the direct presentation of embodied protection as a way of filtering reality, seen in wood cuts from the 1500’s and 1600’s (figures 2.1 & 2.2, p. 26).

While living with parents in the midst of the doings of life, children recognize structures clear enough for them to (gradually) make sense of what is going on, although details and incomprehensible adult-matters are kept back, deliberately or by habit and culture. A significant aspect of the presentation of ways of life is that the concrete and abstract acts of presentation, as well as the personal and cultural intention of filtered language, actions and costumes, pedagogically challenge the ethical sensibility and care of each adult, and at the same time constantly address the pedagogical child-raising qualities in the culture.

### **Chapter 3: Selecting ways of life**

Institutional upbringing and teaching start to emerge from the last part of the medieval period in Europe. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century’s Renaissance and Reformation educational institutionalization creates a barrier between upbringing and real life, home and school, private and public. The world is no longer presented to the child as a (slowly emerging) meaningful whole, but in parts and pieces (p. 31). The world appears less and less meaningful in a direct manner to the child, but must somehow be *made* coherent and continuous by systematic teaching in school. Experiential, rational and relational meaning and significance are key terms to the cultural representation of ways of human life and life products to the new generation, and thus ontological, epistemological and methodical questions are affected and affecting the pedagogical issues at stake. A basic point for Mollenhauer is that every single thing, issue or event in the world is related to, interdependent with, given meaning by, and fitting into a bigger whole in some way or another. Hence, every pedagogical choice made by the adult in a culture requires an ethical responsibility to the world. The onto-epistemological quality of every educational choice and view is always alternative and could have been different. The possible choice always exceeds the real choice, and pedagogical reality such always could have been another. What Mollenhauer tries to explain by exploring the Czech pedagogue Johan Amos Komensky’s (or

Comenius) book *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*, *The Visible World in Pictures* (published in Nuremberg in 1658), and the Spanish painter Diego Velazques' painting *Las Meninas* (1656), is related to the complexity of education and culture, and to the fact that human existence always is alternative and could have been different. Each of the two works points to the aporia of pedagogical practice; the ethical responsibility of the older generation of representing a true and trustworthy world to the young, and the acknowledgment that every representation of the world always is selective, partial, alternative, and even a distorted representation. Therefore, certainty, actuality and truth are debatable ethical and pedagogical dimensions that should be kept warm in the culture by continually being discussed as alternatives.

### Chapters 4 and 5: Preparedness or readiness?

Chapters 4 and 5 are interconnected and interdependent like the rest of the chapters in Mollenhauer's book. But while the remaining chapters precede and exceed each other, chapters 4 and 5 actually represent two sides of the same coin. *Bildsamkeit*, or *developmental preparedness*, as the term is translated in a recent paper (Friesen & Saevi, 2010), is a certain preparedness for *Bildung* built on unconditional trust from the adults in a culture. *Self-activity*, the child's response to the trusting relationship with the adults, is the child's action in due time, when he or she is ready to act. Bollnow (1989) points to the often-disregarded pedagogical knowledge that human change and development cannot be externally forced on the child. Developmental preparedness expresses a prepared potentiality in the child, *not* a prepared *readiness*. There has to be something present in the young person, which is oriented toward growth, and which "asks" for the adult's help. Young persons have to be ready for education in order to be susceptible to the teacher's request for learning. Of course this developmental readiness is seldom conscious to the child, and often not even to the teacher. Moreover, being ready for learning might be less of a cognitive question than a question of pedagogical tone and climate. Bollnow (1989) puts it like this:

Readiness to be educated is definitely not rooted in the intellect; rather it is founded on the deeper and therefore much more securely progressive spirit of a morning-like atmosphere. Accordingly, education must take this notion as its starting point: it should orient itself to the perfection of this spirit by guarding it and rebuilding it time and again when it is being destroyed. (p. 21)

Adult-child or teacher-student encounters have the potential of turning into pedagogical moments, if the teacher truly pays attention to the child's expectations toward his or her possible and open future. The young person's silent expectations, eagerness and hope for his or her coming life, provide the possibility for the teacher to pedagogically intend moments of meaningful existential experience. Expectations however, are most breakable. So first of all, the adult must recognize the existence of expectations in the child in a conscious and particular way, and be willingly attentive to the potential traces of self, left behind by him or her. Developmental preparedness, in German *Bildsamkeit*, is this fragile quality founded in the breakable, but at the same time durable quality of hopeful pedagogical waiting in trust and belief to the child. *Bildsamkeit* springs from teaching and learning as one interdependent process that cannot be separated or predicted. Rather, *Bildung* is a kind of pedagogical dwelling with the young person, being both close and distant enough to adjust to his

or her way of relating to the matters of the world and to self and others. Developmental preparedness is a counter-movement to the educational readiness so commonly taken for granted in schools and kindergartens today. We tend to believe that the child is ready when the adult is ready, or when the curriculum tells that the child biologically or psychologically should be ready. Mollenhauer resists this instrumental thought, and turns the process upside down. He insists that the adult is the one to be cautious of his or her expectations to the child, and of the ontological rather than the epistemological climate of the pedagogical sphere.

## Chapter 6: Relation to Self

*Identity*, Mollenhauer (1983 / 2014) claims, “is the relationship of the I to itself” (p. 116). This understanding represents a crucial difference to identity understood as a set of social roles, or as the transaction of desirable manners intending to fit the changing demands of conventionality. As explained in a translator’s footnote, identity as *Bildung* is seen as a differentiation of self from others at an existential, rather than at a psychological or sociological level. Dissatisfaction with my *self* and not only with one of my social roles is the driver behind self-activity. In this dynamic process what is possible goes beyond what is “real” (Mollenhauer, 1996, p. 140). Our identity is a necessary fiction, “characterized by an intrinsic instability” [...] “a constant movement into the future” (Mollenhauer, 1983/ 2014, p. 117). Identity does not exist other than as an experienced problem with one’s self, and thus cannot be explored scientifically. Identity can best be explored through analogies where I am my own prototype and model in the first place. The question is how teachers and parents in a culture may help the young with their identity problems. Mollenhauer suggests that adults “refuse to sacrifice their own possibilities to so-called reality and to the ‘coercion’ exerted by the circumstances and limitations of life; and do so without falling prey to delusions” (p. 129). This, Mollenhauer claims, is the only way we as adults can justify the importunity of upbringing and education.

## Conclusion

I wonder if the willingness and ability to understand pedagogy in this way will find a suitable resonance in the reader, who may be concerned about how best to teach or to be a good parent. My worry is that the book will ignite enthusiasm in some readers, but the flame might soon be extinguished because the culture and the educational system go against such “heretical” pedagogical thoughts. This is the serious situation in Europe and Scandinavia today. Pedagogical relations are expected to pay off in terms of educational effects and results, and educational and cultural interpretation, meaning and content are formalized and increasingly uni-directed. This little book presupposes encounters with readers that are consciously aware of and politically emerged in history and culture; perseverant readers who are willing and able to stick with long-lasting and paradoxical thoughts, and with a deep respect for self and for the dignity of children and young people. Although this might apply to many readers, I think that some readers will find that the book is as multi-layered and aporetic as it is provocative and different. These readers should read and reflect on the book twice or more. It has taken me more than 15 years to try to understand what Mollenhauer actually says and the implications for my thoughts and practice. He provokes and stirs me. His thoughts make me helpless and vulnerable, but at the same time also passionate and curious to understand more. From pedagogical practice in the

classroom and the auditorium, I experience that he definitely is in the know, and that his questions and issues indeed have a strong case.

Mollenhauer himself modestly saw his book as a sketch of a general pedagogy. At the same time however, he considered his pedagogically aporetic questions to be basic to all adults concerned with children. This potential contradiction might illustrate the view that pedagogical practice and theory in fact need nothing more than a sketch to be practiced *pedagogically*<sup>iv</sup>. In other words, pedagogy is best served with open relational structures, paradoxes and interpretations, rather than managerial regulations and directives. A pedagogically qualified and culturally reflexive sketch is enough to open up the necessary space for human rationality and sensitive judgment to be practiced. Pedagogical experience and sincere moral reflection on experience, rather than “formal scholarly descriptions” (Mollenhauer, 1983/2014, p. 74), have primacy for Mollenhauer. Cultural experiential descriptions of particular educational situations show the potential of the child and the adult, and the relation between them, as well as the relation that each of them has to themselves. In this way *only*, Mollenhauer says, the pedagogical meaning of pedagogical work becomes recognizable. He writes:

If we accept Augustine’s metaphorical characterization of *Bildsamkeit* – “call and response” – then the self-reflexive narrative of relationship appears as the appropriate way to represent it. Such narratives explain the thesis that we can only talk coherently and relevantly about *Bildsamkeit* if the process that gives rise to it is translated into a narrative; for only this process allows us to deal with *Bildsamkeit* as an empirical reality. Without these narratives, *Bildsamkeit* remains a fiction, albeit one that is necessary for *Bildung* to be set into motion. Without the fiction of *Bildsamkeit* parents and teachers would make no serious effort to help nurture it. (p. 74)

The pedagogical meaning of educational practice and theory as responses to a call, thoroughly expressed and interpreted in self-reflexive stories told by adults about their relation with children, are, as I see it, the very fulcrum of this highly worthwhile little book.

---

<sup>i</sup> The English term *pedagogy* is here used in the sense of the German term *Pädagogik* or the Norwegian term *pedagogikk*, which both refer to a broad understanding of education as upbringing and teaching in home, school and society, in both personal and professional settings.

<sup>ii</sup> The term *education* in North America “has increasingly come to refer to what happens exclusively in the school, namely the ‘systematic instruction, schooling or training given to the young’ (Oxford English Dictionary (OED))” (Friesen & Sævi 2010, p.126).

<sup>iii</sup> See the following for more on the pedagogical relation and/or aspects of the relation: E. Spranger (1958); O.F. Bollnow (1960); H. Nohl (1935/1970); M. Langeveld (1975, 1983); M. van Manen (1982, 1991, 2002); B. Spiecker (1984); W. Lippitz (1991, 2007); T. Sævi & M. Eilifsen (2008); T. Sævi & H. Husevag (2009); T. Sævi (2011).

<sup>iv</sup> From Greek the term *paidagogos* indicates that the pedagogue existed before pedagogy (Wivestad 2007, p. 299). The *agogos* was the slave responsible for leading (in Greek *agein*) the child (in Greek the *pais* or *paidos*) through daily life. The *paidagogos*’ responsibilities included a pedagogical intention of acting good and trying to practice an excellent *praxis* in relation to the child. See van Manen (1982, 1991, 2002); Biesta (2010); Sævi (2005, in press); Sævi & Eilifsen (2008).

## References

- Biesta, G. J. J. (2010). *Good education in an age of measurement. Ethics, politics, democracy*. London: Paradigm Publishers.
- Biesta, G.J.J. (2011). Disciplines and theory in the academic study of education: A comparative analysis of the Anglo-American and Continental construction of the field. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, 19(2), 175–192.
- Bollnow, O.F. (1960). *Neue Geborgenheit. das Problem einer Überwindung des Existentialismus*. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer. (Original work published 1955)
- Bollnow, O. F. (1989). The pedagogical atmosphere. *Phenomenology + Pedagogy*, 7, 5–63. (Original work published in German 1968)
- Friesen, N., & Saevi, T. (2010). Reviving forgotten connections in North American teacher education: Klaus Mollenhauer and the pedagogical relation. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 42(1), pp. 123–147.
- Gadamer, H.-G. (1960). *Wahrheit und Method. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr.
- Gadamer, H.-G. (1985). *Truth and method*. New York: Crossroads. (Original work published in German 1960)
- Langeveld, M. (1975, November). *Personal help for children growing up*. Lecture delivered at The W.B. Curry Lecture, The University of Exeter.
- Langeveld, M. (1983). The secret place in the life of the child. *Phenomenology + Pedagogy*, 1(1), 11–17; 1(2), 181–191.
- Lippitz, W. (1991). Ethics as limits of pedagogical reflection. *Phenomenology + Pedagogy*, 8, 49–60.
- Lippitz, W. (2007). Foreignness and otherness in pedagogical contexts. *Phenomenology & Practice*, 1(1), pp. 76–96.
- Mollenhauer, K. (1983). *Vergessene Zusammenhänge. Über Kultur und Erziehung*. München: Juventa.
- Mollenhauer, K. (1996). *Glemte sammenhenger. Om kultur og oppdragelse* (S. Wivestad, Trans., Ed.). Oslo: Gyldendal. (Original work published in German 1983)
- Mollenhauer, K. (1983). *Forgotten connections. On culture and upbringing*. (N. Friesen, Ed. & Trans.). London: Routledge. (Original work published in German 1983)

- Nohl, H. (1970). *Die Pädagogische Bewegung in Deutschland und Ihre Theorie*. Frankfurt: G.Schulte-Bulmke. (Original work published 1935)
- Ricoeur, P. (1992). *Oneself as another*. Chicago/ London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Saevi, T. (2005). *Seeing disability pedagogically: The lived experience of disability in the pedagogical encounter*. Bergen, Norway: Bergen University Press.
- Saevi, T., & Eilifsen, M. (2008). “Heartful” or “heartless” teachers? Or should we look for the good somewhere else? Considerations of students’ experience of the pedagogical good. *The Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, 8, pp. 1–14.
- Saevi, T., & Husevag, H. (2009). The child seen as the same or the other? The significance of the social convention to the pedagogical relation. *Paideusis*, 18(2), pp. 29–41.
- Saevi, T. (2011). Lived relationality as fulcrum for pedagogical-ethical practice. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 30(5), pp. 455–461.
- Saevi, T. (in press). Eksistensiell refleksjon og moralsk nøling: Pedagogikk som relasjon, fortolkning og språk. *Norsk Pedagogisk Tidsskrift*.
- Spiecker, B. (1984). The pedagogical relationship. *Oxford Review of Education*, 10(2), pp. 203–209.
- Spranger, E. (1958). The role of love in education. *Universitas. A German review of the arts and sciences quarterly, English edition*, 2(3), pp. 536-546.
- van Manen, M. (1982). Edifying theory: serving the good. *Theory into Practice*, 21(1), pp. 44–49.
- van Manen, M. (1991). *The tact of teaching*. Ontario: The Althouse Press.
- van Manen, M. (2002). Care-as-worry, or don’t worry, be happy. *Qualitative Health Research*, 12(2), pp. 264–280.
- Wivestad, S. M. (2007). Hva er pedagogikk? In O. H. Kaldestad, E. Reigstad, J. Sæther & J. Sætre (Eds.), *Grunnverdier og pedagogikk*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, pp. 293-331.