

The importance of the individual mind for learning processes in general as well as for teachers' training courses in the project in particular

Yesterday Wolfgang and Jan brought up the issue, that students are getting bored with the topic of NS and Holocaust being taught in school. It's quite a fact. On the other hand we know from empirical studies that students on the contrary are highly interested in this period of history – watching motion pictures and videos about the NS and playing online games, in which they can choose an allied role or a Nazi-soldier's role respectively to re-enact the WW II.

That means: They do want to learn something on this topic.

But we know also that despite their leisure activities and despite the lessons given them in school however they are not well informed and don't know the "right" knowledge about the period –

That means: They don't know – or don't want to know – what we want them to know.

There obviously must be a big divide between lesson giving at school and learning by an individual. So we at first have to shift from the focus on how to give lessons as a collection of methods to the focus on questioning our understanding how learning works in order to construct secondly an adequate methodology of teaching.

1. At the latest since constructivism but already since former decades from the cultural historical activity theory we know: Learning is not identical with the lesson given from the teacher, and it is also not identical with listening to teachers' talk and following teachers' orders and thereby adopting teachers' knowledge, judgements, and behaviour. Learning (by an individual) is rather an autonomous individual psychological process activity, following its own rules. It depends on the activities of the others, on the cultural-historical circumstances, on the actually given context, and on many contingencies – but it is not (and cannot be) determined by these.

2. So if we want to be successful teachers, we have to teach in a manner that is adequate to this learning activity and its implications.

I won't talk about all the implications and preconditions of learning processes we already are able to know and therefore we have to know. I just want to focus on the most important aspect, which is usually known as motivation. We all do know that learning is not possible without being motivated. But how does this process of being motivated work?

3. Although most of us make the experience over and over that our attempts to motivate students are failing, we however usually won't stop with these attempts. We don't realize that we are acting within the logic of the recipe "the more the better". We can't realize the eternal return of the same because we believe that we are trying different ways by offering different motives. If one given motive doesn't work than another will do – that's our usual assumption.

4. Of course we sometimes have some success while offering motives. Of course learning actually does take place from time to time. But according to our efforts being

motivating machines all the time we often feel that it's happening too seldom, too weakly, too temporarily, or too slowly. And why does it mostly happen only for some students and not for all of them?

5. The answer is easy: You can't motivate people. Motives rather emerge in people themselves in order to get an object or to come to terms with an object of the internal or external reality. Motives are countless different and they don't have to be conscious at all. And they may change easily during the learning process. Only if the dealing with an object leads the individual to a strong and enduring feeling of personal sense, a learning process will start and going on and going deeply.

6. The personal sense has to be found in the process of constructing the very particular relationship between the individual and the object. So it is the most important question of any learning to be understood as getting involved with the object: "What has this object got to do with me?"

7. Personal sense is not identical with the several societal meanings of an object. (And there is no societal object without such meanings!) But the meanings are the fields in which the individual has to find his or her personal sense. The personal sense is not a concretization of the societal meanings and cannot be deduced from them. The personal sense is rather built from the entire individual's actual life. So Leont'ev can say, that the personal sense concretizes itself in the several societal meanings.

8. What does this all mean for our teaching efforts?

- ◆ we cannot motivate the students
- ◆ we also cannot give the sense to the students

- ◆ All we can do – but that we therefore have to do! – is:

To give the cause and the provocation, the space and the time as well as the information and instruments which are needed for building motives and personal sense by every single student of his and her own.

9. But learning is also a social activity, and we learn in communication and collaboration with others. Therefore teachers need to shape learning environments, in which the single motives and personal sense can be built in a communicative and collaborative context. There is one main learning setting in which this can take place: The Project Learning.

10. How can we learn to shape such environments and how to generate and coach such learning processes?

Marit Tjernstad has initiated a great learning project by asking her students "What would you like to do this year together with me?" And then she gave the students' collective wish space and time: "A journey to Germany." And what the students have learned was definitely more than just preparing a visit to Germany: They discovered their own history and presented it to their community and shared their findings and their perspectives with a German school.

What we can learn from this great experience is how broad and unspecified the learning tasks given to the students have to be framed.

Given the object – for example the Memorial Site Neuengamme – we also have to do the framing as broad as possible: The task could be formulated here: "Make your own sense in the encounter with this memorial site. What has this site got to do with you and what do you want to learn?"

This could lead to an exploration and self-exploration learning project.

Teachers have to learn how to shape such learning processes for and with their students. In order to understand, how our students' learning takes place, we have to explore our own learning by doing it ourselves first and then by reflecting our own learning results as well as our learning processes. Only then we can learn the learning of the learning, which means: to learn the object, to learn how to learn the object and to learn why to learn the object. Therefore we don't have to start with the question: What and how and for what purpose can students learn at this place? But we have to start with the question: "What has the memorial site Neuengamme got to do with me?"

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