

Essay

The Test of Practice—An Essay

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Abstract: This essay starts in medias res, in the puzzling reappearance of the classical metaphor of *Bildung* as the transformation of man's "first" animal nature into the "second" cultivated one. I call it the two-natures metaphor. I think it misrepresents children by prescribing form rather than asking what actually takes form in the child's mind—in his/her relationship with adults. It made me wonder whether this mistake also lingers on in the current discourse on education. I then turn to aspects of John Dewey's subtle and revolutionary critique of the classical theory of formation, but also to make the controversial point that he, too, seems to miss the importance of the child's internal point of view. The importance of the subjective life of the child is suggested first by reinscribing Rousseau and Kant into the intersubjective theories of Hegel and Dewey; second, by reference to recent studies in developmental psychology that offer detailed and in-depth descriptions of our relationship with children. My basic point of departure is the existential encounters between children and adults, for example, as part of classroom practices. The title has a double connotation. It means that theory must be taken as the measure of practice. It means, too, that practice must work as the measure of theory. I will, in the main, try and pursue the last course.

Keywords: *Bildung*; the two-natures metaphor; Dewey's blind eye; Rousseau's point; Kant's invitation; the child perspective; life issues; interpretation

1. The Philosophers' Tower

When I first read the American philosopher John McDowell's book *Mind and World* in its 1997 edition, I came across a metaphor that presents education or *Bildung* as a transformation of man's "first" animal nature into the "second" cultivated one, in what the author called the "space of reason". Let me call it the two-natures metaphor. The metaphor quite recently reappeared in the Canadian philosopher David Bakhurst's idea of *Bildung* or formation. I was puzzled to see that the old metaphor had found its way into contemporary thinking on the formation of mind. I recalled that G.W.F. Hegel had used the same metaphor twice in his *Philosophy of Right* around 1820. In Hegel's particular case, the metaphor was reinforced by the view, traditional at best, that the child's first, animal, nature had to be eradicated—literally rooted out—for the second, cultivated, nature to take its place. The purpose of discipline in education is consequently to break the child's self-will or *Eigenwille*, Hegel adds in that book. This is a harsh measure by any yardstick, and it aligned him with the pietistic educational practice of 18th century Germany. That practice was rejected by most philosophers of education, particularly by Immanuel Kant who, in his *Lectures on Pedagogy*, explicitly warned against breaking the will of the child.

Then more recently, the anthology *Education and Conversation, Exploring Oakshott's Legacy* (2016) introduces a related metaphor, that of formation as initiation. Michael Oakshott, an English philosopher, used the term "initiation into life". Now it seems fair to say that people are initiated into a church, a secret society or a trade by going through the necessary rites de passage. But children are not initiated into life. They are born into life as a biological fact in the first place. A birth surely implies habits or rituals but is hardly, either for the child or the parent, experienced as an act of initiation. A baby is

received into life by its family and other caregivers. There is nothing inherently wrong with the word initiation. In Oakshott's case, it is located within the space of reason and describes formation within a community of men and women trying to establish the conversation of an enlightened middle class.

To me, an elitist idea of conversation does not per se pose a problem. The problem comes to a pitch when the conversation is set within education or pedagogy. Then, it seems that the concept of reason sketched above is particularly biased. It is descriptive of adult thinking but does not take into account how children reason. To my sense, Hegel's two-natures metaphor illustrates the loss of childhood in educational thinking. In contrast, let me briefly refer to Jean Piaget, the Swiss psychologist, who came to a theory of children's thinking by entering into conversations with children on their own ground. There is the charming story that he started his brand of "clinical" research in the 1920s by engaging his three daughters in plays of words and numbers—father and children as close in their pursuits as you can get. He became the pioneer of later developmental psychology. And he came out with an implicit critique of a theory of formation that, in its coyness, foregoes the tumults of childhood life.

2. Unhappy Metaphors

Practical discourse metaphors, particularly the striking ones, are forceful figures of speech that can sum up what the author has in mind and make it memorable too. But they are not innocent figures of speech. A metaphor can distort or fail both its object and its objective. It can repeat old prejudices or undo and contradict the best intentions of its users. How powerful metaphors can be is seen in the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch's "History", a painting of a boy standing before an old man seated and with a book in his hands, shown in the Oslo University Aula: the child in the posture of an astute listener, the teacher as a bearded sage. Metaphors act like images that can benefit education, but can also make people go about their habitual affairs without questions, making for inadequate and even destructive teaching habits. Thus, it is wise to furnish the metaphors we live by with a critical context, both historical and present.

There are happy and there are unfortunate metaphors. The one about the child's two natures seems particularly infelicitous. It points to a deficit in the concept of formation itself: that it prescribes a form rather than asking what takes form in children's life. It pins us to final adult aims rather than to the beginning of a person's life; it is a remnant of the archetypal child as a creature of polymorphous passions that can only be redeemed by the firm will of an adult authority. The concept of initiation indicates a one-way street from the child's animal appetites towards the "logical space of reason"; from the baby's natural rawness to the "citadel of civilization", as the philosopher Richard Peters once had it. It privileges the adult view of the cultured world as the haven of truth and morality. It may also, in John Dewey's critical words, be indicative of a "feudally organized society with its rigid division of inferior and superior", incompatible with democracy [1] (p. 121).

The received thinking overlooks simple facts of reciprocity: that the thread of reason is spun from the very beginning of a person's life with others. Surely, caregiving is governed by practices: by habits and technologies, and by the institutions that house them. But practices are also initiated by the changing needs of infants and so jointly formed by infants and caregivers in ongoing adjustments. The baby initiates the mother into motherhood within their vital common experiences. The two-natures metaphor sets up a deceptive difference between infantile irrationality and adult reason, and proceeds to make formation the work only of teachers and good educational institutions. Institutions are necessary. But, as Dewey has it, the privileged adult perspective regards the child "comparatively" and takes the immaturity of the child as a deficit rather than an intrinsic capacity or talent for interaction. The terms seem to bolster Dewey's argument. *Bildung* is related to German *Bild* or image, originally the image of God the creator or author of mankind. The word formation harks back to the Aristotelian form or essence of man. Both concepts have a whiff of tradition and permanence. For all the merits of the initiation metaphor, it still depends on the idea of reason as something above and beyond children's lives. This view can have dramatic effects when children and adults are assigned to different ontological orders of humanity. And it burdens education with the redundant task of connecting what

is always already connected. It persuades teachers to apply contrived bridges between the child and the curriculum, for example by artificial motivation and behavior modification schemes that ignore learning as the reconstruction of situations of doubt, dissatisfaction or distress.

3. The Subject as Action

Dewey suggests that we better look to vocabularies of the in-between, to the prefix *inter*, as in words such as interest and interaction. The prefix offers a path beyond the dualisms that still haunt our picture of education. But the alternative to the two-natures metaphor is even more radical. Dewey's naturalism says that there is nothing outside of nature, and thus the concept of *Bildung* is dissolved in natural or organic processes. In this scheme, the Hegelian mind or *Geist* that still seems to inhabit formation theory reappears as nature—nothing less than a revolution in philosophy. Dewey's naturalistic turn does away with the attempts to erect hard and fast walls between mental and physical processes, and between stages in human development. That means reason is not consigned to a privileged period or place in a person's life. And it means that mind is public rather than private, intermediate rather than internal. In *Experience and Nature*, he writes that "subjective mind" is "a mode of natural existence", and thinking is "a preliminary, tentative and inchoate mode of action" [2] (p. 220f). There, he takes issue, too, with the Spanish philosopher George Santayana's original idea of an "inward landscape"—it smacks too much of the Romantic belief in an inner affirmation.

Reason is more than a cognitive power or ability brought to fruition by pure intellectual training in academic institutions. It is subjective in the sense that a person's inner life co-exists with outer circumstance in conjoint activities, and according to Dewey ideally practiced in vocational training. The gist of Dewey's progressivism is supported by the view that three developmental psychologists hold about children's activities:

Children are not blank tablets or unbridled appetites or even intuitive seers. Babies and young children think, observe, and reason. They consider evidence, draw conclusions, do experiments, solve problems, and search for the truth. [3] (p. 13)

Like Dewey did before them, they hold the two-natures thesis to be "just plain wrong". They do not see reason or mind as something within our skull but put the child firmly back into the world of activities with things and persons.

In *Democracy and Education*, the subjective is not the name of a particular consciousness or a knower or a self but of a "course of action". Almost 25 years later, in a rejoinder to his critics, Dewey reiterates that the word subject refers to the existence of an "agency of doing", a person interacting with others within socio-biological settings. This view chimes with his consistent rejection of Romantic self-indulgence and Kantian a priori principles for their betrayal of reality. Dewey offers us a theory of interaction in which experience, thinking and the so-called method of inquiry is latched on to a theory of growth rather than formation. This is what sets him at odds with the classical theory of *Bildung*, in which self-determination or *Selbstbestimmung* plays such a significant role.

4. Ignored Psychology?

Dewey's transformation of the classical theory in *Democracy and Education* ushers in an education tailored to the modern industrial world and also offers a blueprint for the current critique of globalized education. But there seems to be one problem in his theory, which is making subjectivity into an auxiliary to what he calls a reconstruction of events. In this reconstruction, "the contents of an inner and private realm . . . finds its legitimate outcome in the conception of experiencing", as he has it in *Experience and Nature* [2] (p. 230). For all its merits, his theory of subjectivity falls short of the intuitive experiences of ourselves as persons with an internal or private life accompanied by images, reflections and musings that do not readily relate to doing, coping or solving problems. Dewey answers the question: What is an experience? But he does not, I think, adequately answer the question: Who is the child in the experience? He passes by the psychology of the child, and therefore misses children's

particular place in the business of education. My thesis seems to be countered by Dewey on several occasions, for example in an article written in 1897, “The interpretation side of child-study”, where the professed aim is to let the child become master of his/her own self and not a pawn in adult schemes; or in *The Child and the Curriculum* of 1902, where the child is seen as a person in his or her own right.

Yet I feel that these early intentions do not come to fruition in what deserves the epithet child psychology. I think it is due to the general drift of his theory of interaction. It seems that he comes close to what Hegel used to do when he—as a proto communitarian—dissolved the subject in “objective” social institutions such as the family and the state, only that Dewey comes forth as Hegel naturalized, and with a full-blown theory of action to boot. Gordon Allport, a Harvard psychologist, offers a more obvious explanation in Paul Schilpp’s *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, which came out in its first printing in 1939. In the article “Dewey’s individual and social psychology”, he concludes that Dewey never conducted psychological research or dealt clinically with single cases, and thus did virtually nothing of the work that contemporary psychologists are supposed to do. In a rejoinder to Allport, Dewey admits to the absence of a “theory of personality” in his work, due to his dislike of “spiritualistic”—read Romantic and idealist—theories of the personal self. This is how he concludes: “I am obliged to admit what he [Allport] says about the absence of an adequate theory of personality.” [4] (p. 555). This may explain why Dewey did not take an interest in Freud and his method of interpretation of the inner life. Psychoanalysis was too clinical and directed at personal selfhood—and not particularly democratic either in its popularity among the American urban elite.

5. Childhood Revisited

Much scorn has been heaped upon Rousseau for giving the nature of the child priority in education, and next for creating a “pedagogical province” for the young Emile to stay in till well into his teens, separating him from the harms of society and the ills of civilization. Now if you keep the first proposal as a sound insight and reject the second as an excessive and indeed impossible measure, he tells us what every parent knows: that infancy, the period before the child normally starts to speak, is determined by the unconditional demand for attention and care from the infant’s caregivers. Rousseau was the first author I know to move that insight from the private to the public sphere, in *Emile*. But did he actually speak for children’s “unbridled appetites” and the irresponsible permissiveness of grown-ups? Hardly, he just brought us to the fact that in infancy, the infant’s needs are predominant and set the scene for upbringing, an insight practiced today by many Norwegian parents in the rush of everyday life. His advice that to lose time is more important than to win time in child rearing was a cautionary note against leaving it to the set regimes of the Church and the bourgeois elite. Mind you, he spoke first about infancy and then about boyhood in the name of the boy Emile, who in the book is exposed to hard discipline in the Spartan spirit. No permissiveness there!

The function of the school has, of course, always been to discipline the new generation, but then discipline is a double-edged notion: discipline and self-discipline. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey suggests that we relax the “grip of authority of custom and traditions as standards of belief” and of discipline [1] (p. 305). There is, as we know, a difference between boot-camp discipline and discipline that comes from conjoint practices. The false dichotomy between discipline and self-discipline disappears if you see them as two aspects of the on-going negotiations between mother and child—in the best of worlds, discipline deals with self-discipline. The idea of self-discipline as the child’s willing contribution to communal life is today replaced by an idea of self-regulation that wanders in the shadows of achievement and control.

Historically, infancy and early childhood used to be the responsibility of the family. In our system, early childhood is “augmented” by pre-school teaching arrangements that prepare for a life far beyond the perspective of the child. The revision of Norwegian primary- and secondary school teacher education scheduled for 2017 is a case in point. The political authorities disregard child- and adolescent psychology to the total neglect of major advances in our knowledge about children’s world. This neglect may be explained by the widespread belief that children are a human resource in

post-enlightenment competitive societies. What can get us a bit closer to the inner lives of children? Let me suggest a road to be taken.

6. Kant's Abiding Problem

Classical formation theorists are, of course, sensitive to the facts of childhood life. They are ready to talk about children's self-formation, which allows for their autonomy and capability to carve out a life and set goals for themselves independently of aims put to them by adults. But the term self-formation is ambiguous. If the form in formation refers to the Greek *hypokeimenon*, or what persists through change as a fixed essence, the idea of an interactive self tells us a different story. Dewey thinks that the self comes into being and finds its form in the stream of experience, like in a narrative that continues and always begins anew as long as its author exists. He uses the term "plasticity" about the "ability to learn from experience" and the "power to develop dispositions" [1] (p. 44). The self is not form, but potentiality or readiness for having experiences, for doing and undergoing, so vividly observed in young children. If form is fixed either at the beginning or the end of experience, then the self is arrested and self-formation is a contradiction in terms.

What, then, about the term self-initiation—does that make better sense? Self-initiation presupposes a self or a person who can make informed decisions about joining an institution or engaging in a practice. But young children are not replete decision-makers, a problem that typically bothers the practice of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its intention to give children a voice in matters familial. It seems inevitable that the authority of parents and lawyers carries the day, and often necessarily so. If we have only a paltry idea of an independent self, we are easily left with initiation as the ideal default position. Even if this is inevitable in a general sense since parents and teachers are responsible caregivers, we are responsible also for the integrity of child. In order to avoid an unchecked paternalism, we need a robust idea of self. Or we may end in the paradox that the self is declared independent in theory while in practice we adults determine the criteria for that independence. According to Kant in his *Lectures on Education*, this is the abiding problem of an education that aims at freedom of thought and expression. I have expressed a reservation against classical formation theory and Dewey's socio-biological theory of interaction. Now let us take another tack and visit theories or rather snippets of theories that stand askew to Dewey's conception of education, and bring us closer to a subjective or internal view.

7. In Foro Interno

There are candidates for human realities that do not belong to Dewey's chosen vocabulary: terms such as authenticity, autonomy, dignity, self-respect, and self-reflection. Authenticity is beautifully described in Rousseau's *Emile* Book IV, in the sequence titled the "Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar", where the priest refers to his conscience as the "voice of the soul". I read the piece as an extended political argument, and the soul as its center of integrity—no Romantic excesses here! Kant went a step further and used the term autonomy about a person's use of his moral reason. Man's dignity depended on the use of reason. Dignity was also an abiding characteristic of a person's identity and character, and was closely related to the self-respect that deals with the respect for the dignity of others. Subjectivity does not—*pace* Hegel—refer to an I = I that falls over itself in narcissistic rapture. It is rather the name of feelings, imaginations, and thoughts reflected in our relationship with others. Dignity is dependent on taking the point of views of the other. This is Rousseau and Kant, and the terms they use refer to phenomena *in foro interno*.

Dewey was wary of idealist jargon. What went on in the internal world was, for him, the stuff or potential for coping with the world; this is his particular brand of "behaviorism". Not that Dewey is averse to ideals and self-reflection. In *A Common Faith*, he says that the ideal "emerges when the imagination idealizes existence by laying hold of the possibilities offered to thought and action." But he thinks that this ideal must have "its roots in natural conditions" [5] (p. 48). Rousseau relates differently to subjective life. In the epistolary novel *Julie*, he inspired a new sensibility set within love,

family and friendship. His many autobiographical writings were, of course, about himself. But they also described modern man in his inner turmoil, and thus gave the reading public a great push towards personal self-reflection.

Kant, for his part, imagined that children are not initiated into but born to dignity as a “gift of birth”. Dignity is not earned by merit, granted by others or defined by fiat. The birthright points to the dignity that we ascribe to the child in the name of “humanity”, which figures as an ideal or mindset or reflection that may open our eyes to the world of the child. It is not to attribute a social role to but to respect the child as already born into humanity. It is a “right” that we ascribe to the newborn and the elderly, the sick and the quick, the poor and the rich, an idea that Kant worked out in his moral anthropology. Again, Dewey would not object to this, I believe, if only ideas of reason and dignity were treated as potentialities or ideas in action. The point lies elsewhere, in Kant’s invitation to ask how self-respect takes shape within the subjective world of the child, with his/her joys and frustrations. Ascription is neither a prescription nor a pure figment of imagination. The ideal ascription of dignity takes place in actual settings with real persons involved. The force of this ascription may be felt as the tension between ideal and real, a tension that can transform a relationship, as when a bully and his or her victim are reconciled with one another. There is nothing idealistic here, as far as I can see. In this particular sense, dignity, like justice and freedom of speech, are rather “as ifs”, that is, ideals or proposals that may be realized in some form or other. In children, dignity comes into being by increment, as an addition in trust and confidence in the adult world. In the personal or inner realm, it may ripen into the self-reflection that works itself out in the social drama of Henrik Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck*.

8. Life Issues

Hegel famously introduced the social subject in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* when he insisted on mutual recognition as “the action of one as well as of the other”—“*das Tun des Einen ist das Tun des Anderen*”. In Dewey’s register, this double action is transformed into social cooperation in a precarious world. By invoking Rousseau and Kant, I have tried to reinscribe the inner voice of the subject into that equation. Some will find this regressive. They may argue that Facebook is afloat with selfies and that the blogosphere abounds with empty confessions from the inner world of adolescent girls. They are right for the wrong reasons. The virtual subject has precious little to do with subjectivity. More to the point is the recent spate of controversial autobiographies that have been published as novels. Two Norwegian examples are Karl Ove Knausgaard’s *My Struggle*, and Linn Ullmann’s *The Troubled*, about her relationship with her father Ingmar Bergmann. In both books, childhood remembrances play a part, and that brings me back to the vexing question: How do we get access to the child’s inner world? One answer is: through observation and interpretation. And both move within the bounds of mutual recognition and cooperative action.

Let me go into some details. *Democracy and Education* is based on the “principle of continuity”, that life, experience and learning are continuous transformative processes. Recent psychological findings bear out Dewey’s view in this respect. Alison Gopnik and others have given surprising and even stunning descriptions of the capacities and continuities in children’s lives. In his book *The Interpersonal World of the Child*, Daniel Stern confirms the point that human development is continuous, that there are no time-locked specific phases in a child’s life, and that there are scant reasons for introducing gaps in his/her development. This is in contrast to the traditional and formalistic reception of stage theories of development among educationalists. Surely, there are maturational leaps in children’s development, but according to Stern they are caught up in what he calls “domains of relatedness”. The domains rather than stages or phases in development express what he calls “life issues”. This is what he says:

All domains of relatedness remain active during development. The infant does not grow out of any of them; none of them atrophy, none become developmentally obsolete or get left behind. And once all domains are available, there is no assurance that any one domain will necessarily claim preponderance during any particular age period. [6] (p. 31)

There are, of course, significant transformations in infancy, from the physical intimacy in the first months of life to the verbal interaction of the toddler. Developmental studies have shown—and I refer both to Stern and others—that during the period from two to six months, babies “consolidate the sense of a core self as a separate, cohesive, bounded, physical unit, with a sense of their own agency, affectivity, and continuity in time” [6] (p. 10). These capacities make the infant “exert major control over the initiation, maintenance, termination, and avoidance of social contact with mother; in other words, they help to regulate engagement” [6] (p. 21). From these studies, we learn that mother and infant together are initiating and forming the relation that takes its own course in later life. That means our object of study is not the child or parent in isolation but in interplay. The specific life issue of autonomy and attachment, for example, can be observed in children during the first few months, when the child averts his/her gaze to signal a “no” to his/her mother and in the next moment moves to be cuddled by her. It becomes obvious during the “terrible twos”, and recurs in adolescent separation conflicts—and in later marital quarrels for that matter. Life issues are themes that reverberate through our lives; they are forms of life that always turn us back to the basic relationships with significant others.

9. Children’s Reasoning

In the book *The Scientist in the Crib*, written by three developmental psychologists, continuity appears in a Deweyan garb. Their psychology fills the gap in his theory, and makes it even more relevant for education. Their preferred metaphor is the computer, which is illustrative and attests to their cognitive bias. The book is written for the general reader, based on research done over the past generation or by themselves and others. In their view, children do not accumulate more and more “input” or knowledge, but switch spontaneously from one “program” to a more powerful one in the course of life. They conclude that:

What we experience interacts with what we already know about the world to produce new knowledge, which enables us to have new experiences and to make and test new predictions, which enables us to produce further knowledge, and so on. [3] (p. 150)

Compare this with what Dewey writes in *Democracy and Education* about his key notion: “Experience . . . is not a combination of mind and world, subject and object, method and subject matter, but is a *single continuous interaction* of a great diversity . . . of energies” [1] (p. 167, my italics). Both quotations move us closer to Dewey’s method of inquiry as it was later worked out in more detail in *How We Think*.

The authors of *The Scientist in the Crib* show, like Piaget did before them, that consecutive forms of reason are at work in the early life of the child. Their suggestion that “It is not that children are little scientists but that scientists are big children” is a fine take on the Biblical reminder that a childlike mindset leads to redemption [3] (see p. 9). What stands is that human life is a two-way street that works throughout life and makes it possible for grown-ups to take advantage of children’s natural capacities for learning.

The Scientist in the Crib is a vivid account of how children, from the very first months, interact intelligently with their surroundings. As cognitive scientists, the authors use behavioral data in order to sustain their theory of children’s capacities. The authors are not averse to what goes on in the internal lives of children—their feelings and passions, their dreams and anxieties—but their main quarry is the observed child. As you might expect from cognitivists in the turf wars in academia, they are skeptical of both Sigmund Freud and B.F. Skinner: Freud because he saw children as the “apotheosis of passion”, Skinner because he took children to be blank slates to be inscribed by “reinforcement schedules”. The authors are, of course, equally happy with Piaget and with Lev Vygotsky for his sociocultural theory of interaction.

10. Understanding Children

A prime example of the interpretation of inner life is psychoanalysis, presented to a general public by Sigmund Freud a hundred years ago, in his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1916). Psychoanalysis is based on recollection and interpretation of lost or repressed childhood memories. Why recollection? First, Freud proposed that infancy and early childhood was the period of life when the basic dispositions of the adult person were formed. Some of the woe and despair, the angst and aggression, the quirks and irrationalities that befall adult life is, he suggested, fueled by unsolved infantile conflicts and triggered by present circumstances. Whatever you make of this thesis, it represents a high regard, not only for unconscious drives and their emergence in adult life, but also for the child as a very sophisticated human being with a complex inner life; Second, he proposed a method of interpreting mental life, a way of getting to know the vagaries of the human mind and its expressions. Interpretation may not be the best term here. It is normally used about what we do when we read books.

But a person is not a book. As Paul Ricoeur once had it, in writing a book the reader is absent, while in reading the book the author is absent. What about translation, does that give us a better fit? The term is usually used about moving chunks of meaning from one language into another by a translator. A translator is a messenger, a *theoros* or spectator who mediates between languages foreign to each other. Adults may experience children's minds as exotic but hardly foreign. I would suggest the term understanding for what I am getting at, redolent of the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey's "elementary" understanding or *Verstehen*. Elementary understanding takes place in the life of the family and the classroom, with attention to the nitty-gritty details of that life. It seems that the basic benchmark of educational practice is found here, in the successes and disasters that test the teacher's imagination and discretion. Much like in ordinary family life, understanding is determined by face-to-face relationships that demand presence in the very sense of being there with the other. If we are looking for the child's perspective, we may begin with Daniel Stern's psychodynamic approach.

Stern starts down a path similar to Freud's. He too relies heavily on the tools of cognitive developmental psychology, but his theoretical approach differs. Drawing on psychoanalysis, he makes a distinction between the "observed" child in interplay and the "clinical child" that is "reconstructed . . . in the course of clinical practice" [6] (p. 14). Reconstruction refers to psychotherapy, which joins the client and the therapist in an attempt to actualize the client's past experiences and repressed memories within the therapeutic setting. Now, education is not psychotherapy and the psychologist in the classroom may not be the patent cure for educational ills. But there is still the fact that children have an inner life that is visible in speech and body tone, in gestures and facial expressions, which is highly relevant in education too. This is a possible setting for a dialogue of understanding. It seems that in order to understand another person's internal life, you have to supplement the broad idea of behaviorism that Dewey endorses. You have to enrich observations of behavior with "inferential leaps" as to what goes on in your interlocutor's mind, a practice we are familiar with in our daily life.

Understanding is the mode that gives us access to the person's internal life, and its vehicle is dialogue: informal and playful or formal and goal directed but not dominated by a script defined by only one of the participants. Its educational aim is not to diagnose or to cure an ill, and it is not primarily a problem-solving activity. It is more like a disclosure or opening up in the sense of Martin Heidegger's *alêtheia* or unconcealment of being, a practice that generates a new sense or experience of the world and one's place in it. If understanding is poetry in the Greek sense of *poiesis*, the dialogue is a poetic activity that brings the fruits of understanding to life. Understanding relationships in real time is difficult and demanding, and requires an agile mind not bound by routine. With children, dialogue depends, first of all, on listening, on letting the other express his or her feelings and thoughts without interference from authority or fixed beliefs. It is a holding back on the part of the adult for the child to give form to his/her inner life and freedom to voice his/her independent judgment. Dialogue requires the mutual attunement or finding the tone and rhythm that fosters trust. It thrives on questions of wonder and goes beyond coping. It builds knowledge, transforms relationships and fulfills

educational aims. Add to this professional wit, and you have a strong case for a relation-centered education based on youthful energy and adult wisdom.

11. The Test of Practice

In Hegel's theory of formation, there is this remarkable rift mentioned above. He made *Aufhebung* or sublation, with its triple meanings of abolishing, lifting up, and preserving culture, into a key concept of transformation. But he seemed not to extend this dynamic to the education of infants and young children. The clue to an explanation is found in his description of the child within family life. The first nature and its needs are satisfied in the family, in the harmony of "love". But the child has to overcome his/her life in bliss, and the driving force is the "inner negativity" in the relation between the child and his/her parents. In this process, the first nature is productive for a specific reason: it actually provokes the second nature. The internal negativity is the soil on which the second nature shall grow. The hard work of education consists in overcoming the "contradictions" that appear between nature and culture, the child and the adult. In its struggle for independence, the child's "irrationality" is transformed into adult "rationality" by the interference of the adult. In other words, the struggle for independence takes place within a relation that has the independence of both the child and the adult as possible outcomes. This scheme is, in its structure, close to G.H. Mead's idea that a child gets its self-consciousness by taking in the attitudes of the other. Or to put it like this: it is the internalized "me" that elicits the reactions of the "I" and is co-productive of the child's independence.

Hegel and Mead did not directly impact education. Dewey definitely did. But even his work does not dispel my impression that philosophers did not get the child perspective right in the way that psychologists such as Daniel Stern try to do. Modern education needs a strong and sturdy conception of the subject in order to fulfill its democratic aims. It also needs to address the singular situation of the particular classroom, and to rethink what it is to take the perspective of the other. The basis of education is that it is grounded in practices. The test of education is to test these practices. And the success of its practices must, in the end, be achieved in situ by those who come together in the singularity of teachers and students.

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