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“Education as a *Geisteswissenschaft*,” An Introduction to Human Science Pedagogy¹

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Abstract

Human Science Pedagogy is “a strange case,” as Jürgen Oelkers has recently noted: In the Anglophone world, where Gert Biesta has compellingly encouraged scholars to “reconsider education as a *Geisteswissenschaft*” (a human science) its main themes and the contributions of its central figures remain unknown. For Germans, particularly in more “general” or philosophical areas of educational scholarship (i.e. *Allgemeine Pädagogik*), this same pedagogy is recognized only insofar as it is critiqued and rejected. Taking this strange situation as its frame, this paper introduces Human Science Pedagogy to English-language readers, providing a cursory overview of its history and principal contributors, while suggesting the contemporary relevance of its themes and questions in both English- and German-language scholarship. This paper concludes with an appeal to readers on both sides of the Atlantic to new or renewed consideration of this pedagogy as a significant and influential source for educational thinking deserving further scholarly attention.

Introduction

Human Science Pedagogy (*geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik*) is a way of understanding education in terms of human cultures, practices, and experiences, as well as through biographical and collective history. It offers a perspective on education “as one of the humanities or arts rather than as a science” (Tröhler 2003, p. 759), or alternatively, as a specifically “*hermeneutic science*” (Biesta 2011, p. 185; emphasis added). Human Science Pedagogy has further been defined as an effort to “give meaningful interpretation to educational phenomena in their historical-cultural particularity”² (Matthes 2008, p. 299). Prominent educationists have asked that “education” be “reconsidered” specifically “as a *Geisteswissenschaft*” (Biesta 2015a, p. 665) and that a special place be reserved for the related notion of “pedagogy” specifically as an “an ethics-sensitive language of teaching and an epistemology of practice that is guided by an interest in the child’s experience” (van Manen 2015, p. 218). Regardless, sustained English-language accounts of any length of the proponents, themes and history of Human Science Pedagogy are all but non-existent.³ From an Anglophone perspective, this approach to pedagogy offers a non-instrumental, non-psychological and affirmative (i.e. non-critical) account of education and upbringing. It also provides an understanding of education *not* as an “area” of study for disciplines like psychology and sociology, but as Biesta (2015a) explains, “as an academic discipline in its own right, with its own forms of theory and theorizing and its own intellectual and social infrastructure” (p. 14).

In these and other senses, Human Science Pedagogy provides the basis for a coherent alternative to what could be called the two dominant English-language discourses in education: On the one hand, a critique of educational practices and policies as intrinsically “oppressive,” and on the other, their reduction to the instrumentalities of psychology and sociological administration. Human Science Pedagogy focuses on practical pedagogical themes of ongoing relevance

¹ I would like to thank the many people who provided feedback on early drafts of this paper, including Hanno Su, Annika Wilmers and Rose Ylimaki.

² This quote is translated from the German by the author, as are all others from German-language sources.

³ Van Manen and Adams provide two paragraphs on the subject in their entry on “Phenomenological Pedagogy” in the *Encyclopedia of Educational Theory and Philosophy* (Phillips, 2014). Van Manen also provides a page of related names and dates in an appendix to his 2015 *Pedagogical Tact* (pp. 204-205). For a critical essay on Human Science Pedagogy from a Swiss perspective—focusing on its resonances with the work of author Thomas Mann and with Weimar-era culture—see Tröhler as cited above. Importantly, Christoph Wulf has published some summaries of Human Science Pedagogy in various articles and encyclopedia entries (e.g. see: Phillips 2014, pp. 271-272), the longest of which occupies over 20 pages largely unnoticed 2003 book on German *Educational Science*. Given that it is a relatively short excerpt and the original volume is out of print, I have made this Wulf’s account available here: <http://www.normfriesen.info/hermeneuticpedagogies.pdf>

in English- and German- language scholarship today, including pedagogical tact (e.g., van Manen 2015; Burghardt & Zirfas 2018), the pedagogical relation (e.g., Friesen 2017; Kreis 2018), (auto)biography as a kind of path of becoming or *currere* (e.g., Krüger & Marotzki, 2014; Pinar, 2019),⁴ the singular nature of the school and classroom (e.g., Masschelein & Simons 2012; Brinkmann 2017), questions of “philosophical” or “pedagogical anthropology” (e.g., Wulf & Zirfas, 2013)⁵ and existential aspects of education (e.g., Wehner 2002; English 2013). Finally, as Biesta notes, “perhaps the most important point” to be made about Human Science Pedagogy is that it “established the discipline” of education “as what we might call an *interested* discipline: one] organized around a certain normative interest” or intention—specifically that of “the emancipation of the child,” or more broadly, his or her present and future well-being (2015b, p. 15).

Human Science Pedagogy emerged in tandem with the broader *human* sciences laid out by Wilhelm Dilthey in the late 19th century in explicit opposition to the increasing dominance of the *natural* and *applied* sciences. Dilthey included philosophy, theology, and studies of literature and art as human sciences—all disciplines that work *hermeneutically* or through interpretation. Dilthey was also clear that pedagogy—particularly insofar as it begins “with the description of the educator in his relationship to the student or child” (1888, p. 8)—should also be considered a hermeneutic human science as well. According to Daniel Tröhler, this “human scientific” understanding of education went on to form “the framework of German educational discourse of the twentieth century” (2003, p. 30)—although it was unilaterally declared to be “at its end” already in the late 1960s (Dahmer & Klafki 1968). Almost any German-speaking education scholar today will warn you that the tradition represented by Human Science Pedagogy is widely avoided in their field and is regarded as both flawed and superannuated. Above all, it is seen as insufficient when seen in the light of today’s multicultural, postmodern social conditions (e.g., see: Wimmer, 2002). Human Science Pedagogy, in short, is “a strange case,” as Jürgen Oelkers (2006) has noted.

Taking this strange case as its frame, this paper introduces Human Science Pedagogy for English-language readers, and provides a cursory overview of its history, while highlighting the relevance of its themes and methods in both English- and German-speaking scholarship today. In so doing, it also seeks to shed light on its current “strange” contemporary circumstances, and to show that while Human Science Pedagogy certainly has its limitations, it has articulated principles and priorities of either real or potential importance on both sides of the Atlantic. This paper concludes with an appeal to readers from both sides of the Atlantic to new or renewed consideration of this pedagogy as a significant and influential source for educational thinking that deserves recognition as such in both German and English.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834): What is Education?

The human sciences, including pedagogy, were initially theorized at the end of the 19th century by Wilhelm Dilthey as specifically *hermeneutic* sciences. Although Dilthey’s further articulations of hermeneutics, human science and pedagogy are important and are also introduced in this paper, they were deeply influenced by a still earlier scholar who is widely considered one of the principles “founder[s] of pedagogy as a modern discipline” (Böhme & Seichter 2017, p. 413): Friedrich Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher’s thoughts pervade Human Science Pedagogy, but he can at best be called a “human science pedagogue” *avant la lettre*—i.e. before this pedagogy was named as such. In now briefly introducing Schleiermacher, I also highlight the connection between what Schleiermacher has said and what Biesta has more recently identified as the most important potential contribution of human science to English language scholarship—namely its view of education as an *interested* discipline focused on the well-being of the child.

Schleiermacher lectured on education to his students over a number of decades in the early 19th century in Berlin. He opened his very first lecture on education in 1826 simply by saying: “One must assume we are all familiar with what is called “education.” But if we ask for whom this familiar knowledge is turned into a theory and what this theory should be about,” we would simply have to say: “Originally, parents undertook education, and as is commonly acknowledged, they did so without reference to a ‘theory.’” (1826/2000, p. 7)⁶ We’ve all been brought up by someone, we’ve all been to school, and most of us have “educated” others in one way or another. So we all know implicitly what education *is*: As the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) tells us, it is the “systematic instruction... received by a

⁴ *Currere* here refers specifically to “a strategy for students... to study the relations between academic knowledge and life history in the interests of self-understanding and social reconstruction” (Pinar 2019, p. 24).

⁵ Anthropology here refers to the study (-pology) of what it means to be human (anthro)—either from a philosophical or pedagogical perspective.

⁶ These sentences and the others below are taken from a translation of the introductory lecture in Schleiermacher’s *Lectures on Education* by Friesen and K. Kenkies that is currently in progress. The page numbers provided are from the German original provided in the references.

child, typically at a *school*” (2003, emphasis added). And school, in turn, is defined by the OED as the “institution for the formal *education* of children or young people” (2003, emphasis added). Education, in other words, is what happens at school and school, in turn, is defined as the place where education happens. The circularity of these definitions is arguably also built into our self-understandings as practitioners and researchers. Our profession, as Biesta observes, “understands itself as the study of education, thus suggesting that its object of study—education—is simply ‘there’ to be studied” (2012, p. 23). But education is not simply “there” for us like an object of nature might present itself for our inquiry: “[U]nlike trees and planets,” Biesta explains, “education is a social practice that exists in and through the interpretations of those involved in the practice.... [E]ven if educational research[ers] would walk into a school in the hope to find their object of study,” Biesta continues, “they still need [to interpret what] would count as the very education they wish to study” (2012, p. 30). For example: Education would certainly include children working quietly at their desk, but would it also include those outside at recess or others chatting in the halls?

Before we can properly interpret or theorize education, as Schleiermacher goes on to say, we have to find a new “starting point” (p. 9). We cannot simply assume “we are all familiar with what is called ‘education.’” And the point that Schleiermacher chooses to begin his interpretation and theorizing has gone on to constitute one of the cornerstones of Human Science Pedagogy—and it remains prominent in German thinking to this day. For Schleiermacher, education is to be confined neither to the classroom nor to the school in general. Instead, he defines it as follows: “humankind is made up by individual beings who live through a certain cycle of existence. And this [existence] ‘happens in a way that those who are in this cycle at the same time can be divided into an older and younger generation, with the older being the first to leave this earth’” (p. 7). Education, Schleiermacher goes on to conclude, is what occurs between these two generations or groups, between the older and the younger. It follows that the question for education is simply as follows: What do we, as “the older generation, actually want from the younger?” (p. 7)

Schleiermacher’s answer to the circularity of educational definitions and discussions is thus to say that education is about what we adults, the older generation, want for and from the younger. Education can then be said to be manifest at the points where what we “want” with and for the younger is evident. In using the word “want” however, Schleiermacher is not just talking about vague or vain wishes or desires; he sees this adult “want” as embodied and expressed in thought and action—as well as in practice, habit and convention. This “want” is something articulated in parents’ plans and hopes for their children, for example, and it is expressed both consciously and unconsciously in the arrangements of classroom and school—e.g., in the inclusion of playgrounds and recess, or of hallways and lockers. In principle, anything that is in the “realm” of education can be seen as expressive of this interest or want. These artifacts and phenomena all express particular pedagogical and *normative* interests and intentions. Thinking of things like recess and lockers, for example, these intentions can be said to include preparing students for the division of work and leisure, for the division of public and private that reigns in the adult world. These interests can of course be more general and pervasive. They can also include parents’ desires to see their children discover who they are, or to take on a family tradition or business.

It is thus by focusing on this adult “want” or interest that Schleiermacher finds a starting point for his lectures on education. And this starting point in defining education as an “interested” enterprise arguably still serves as the starting point for many who theorize education or pedagogy from a “general” perspective in Germany today. Indeed, it is expressed in the German definition of “education” to this day. Böhm & Seichter’s 2018 dictionary, *Wörterbuch der Pädagogik*, defines education as both

a process and its result, an *intention* as well as actions (of the educator and the *educandus*), the situation of the child and the conditions that constitute it... [it can] describe a particular class of activities, and [thus function as] a descriptive-analytical concept, while at the same time offering criteria for particular activities, and thus [also work as a] *normative* concept. (p. 358; emphases added)

Defining education as encompassing both descriptive and normative dimensions not only echoes Schleiermacher’s ethically charged starting point for the field of pedagogy—What does the older generation actually want with the younger?—it also reflects Biesta’s emphasis on the pedagogical interest. This is one that Biesta describes specifically as “a distinctive educational concern that provides a particular way of looking at and engaging with educational phenomena” (2015, p. 15).

In this context, theorizing education becomes a making explicit of what the intentional want or “will” of the older generation for the younger actually *is*. It also involves explaining what this will *should* be, about—and finally, how it should be expressed in words, action, hopes and plans. And throughout his discussion of this interest or want, Schleiermacher makes it clear it is not about formulating abstract rules or guidelines, but about the vicissitudes and particularities of *practice*. Pedagogical practice, he says “exists independently from theory” and “always precedes” it, giving it a kind of “dignity” and “primacy” all its own. Educational theory, in this sense, then becomes a kind of ethical reflection on practice—a “theory of practice for practice,” a phrase often used to describe Human Science Pedagogy (e.g., Biesta 2011, p. 186; Zirfas 2015, p. 22). In fact, Schleiermacher makes this idea of reflection *on practice for practice* explicit in his lectures: “A significant part of the activity of the older generation extends toward the younger,” he says. This activity, he continues, “is more incomplete or imperfect, the less aware the older generation is of what it is doing and why it is doing it” (p. 11).

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911): Founder of the Human Sciences

Although Dilthey’s work as a professor in Berlin was separated from Schleiermacher’s only by a generation (some of Schleiermacher’s students were Dilthey’s professors) Dilthey’s world was very different. Industrialization, urbanization and specialization had taken over in Berlin and elsewhere; Berlin’s population, as just one example, had sextupled since Schleiermacher’s time. Technology and the natural sciences appeared triumphant. And as mentioned above, it was precisely in opposition to this triumph that Dilthey developed the “human sciences” as a multidisciplinary “science” relevant to the widest range of concerns:

The subjects of assertions in the human sciences vary in their scope—[ranging from] individuals, families, more complex groups, nations, epochs, historical movements or developmental sequences, social organizations, systems of culture ...and finally humanity itself. They can be the subjects of narratives, they can be described, and theories can be developed concerning them. But they always refer to the same fact: humanity or human-socio-historical reality. (2002, p. 103)

Dilthey emphasized that for all their power, the technical and natural sciences could not account for even the most basic aspects and qualities of everyday life and experience, and that they certainly couldn’t shed much light on the vicissitudes of historical, cultural and social change. Dilthey thus set out to develop a set of disciplines and methods, a set of “sciences” in short, which could address such issues. In differentiating between the natural and the human sciences, Dilthey famously stated: “We *explain* nature, but we *understand* mental life” (as quoted by Vial 2013, p. 65). *Explanation* seeks to establish causal relations between isolated parts in order to *control* them. *Understanding* (*Verstehen*) grapples with human situations involving value, feeling, interest and intentions. It involves not just the intellect, but “willing, feeling and thinking” in general:

We *explain* by purely intellectual processes but we *understand* through the concurrence of all the powers of the psyche ... In understanding we proceed from the coherent whole which is... given to us... in order to make the particular intelligible to us. Precisely the fact that we live with the consciousness of the coherent whole makes it possible for us to understand a particular sentence, gesture or action. (Dilthey 1982, p. 172)

In *understanding* something, we do not begin with a fragmentary assemblage of data points, but with an already meaningful world of relations, purposes and intentions (e.g., enjoying a meal, teaching a class). The process of understanding—also known as the hermeneutic process—then moves from a specific sentence, action or gesture to this larger whole, thus generating a kind of tentative knowledge that makes use of and corrects pre-existing impressions, understandings and prejudices. Explanation, on the other hand, separates knowing and doing, truth and value. It endeavors to start from a place *cleansed of* presuppositions. Explanation moves from one isolated part to the next, and on that basis seeks to develop knowledge—knowledge based on certainties and calculated probabilities—that is ultimately free from value or purpose, but that can serve as a basis for causal intervention or control. And although the classroom is a place where modern scientific diagnoses and interventions clearly play a role, it is *hermeneutic* knowing—a willing, feeling and thinking—that is clearly at the forefront in moment-by-moment decisions and interactions between students and teachers.

Phenomenology, alongside hermeneutics, represents a second key method of the human sciences. Phenomenology was developed largely through one of Dilthey’s contemporaries, Edmund Husserl. Late in his life, Dilthey came to know Husserl personally and viewed his “science” and “method” for the investigation of lived experience and consciousness very positively (Makkreel 1973, pp. 273-304). It is also significant that Dilthey saw the reflective

“willing, feeling and thinking” central to the human sciences as reaching their ultimate expression in the form of the biography, above all the autobiography. Throughout his life, Dilthey worked on his own project of biography. He wrote a two-volume intellectual biography of his mentor, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and in his masterwork, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences* (2002), Dilthey analyzes the nature of (auto)biographical texts in some detail. Dilthey insists, for example, that autobiographical writing represents nothing less than “the highest and most instructive form of the understanding of life” (p. 221), declaring it to be “the most direct expression of reflection about life” itself (p. 219).

Dilthey also outlined the foundation and priorities for pedagogy as one of the disciplines of the human sciences. One of Dilthey’s most famous statements regarding education—cited briefly above—is that “the study of pedagogy ... can only begin with the description of the educator in his relationship to the student or child” (1888, p. 8). In making this claim, Dilthey picks up on the relational emphasis implicit in Schleiermacher’s definition of education as the intentions of the older generation towards the younger. And if we include biography, history and humanistic psychology in Dilthey’s notion of “description,” as Dilthey certainly would have, then we can see the work of people like William Pinar, Max van Manen, Conolly and Clendenin and the *oeuvre* of reconceptualist curriculum studies as all encompassed within Dilthey’s founding directive.

Finally, Dilthey also said it is the “duty” of education “to form [bilden] children as persons who carry within them their own purpose” (1971, p. 114). He saw all human “willing, feeling and thinking” as ultimately all being “interested”—as being structured by purposes and goals, as being *teleological* in essence. This teleological character makes education and pedagogy, as the interested formation of others (and of one’s own) interests and purposes the most *human* of human practices and constructions. Its ultimate goal is to help realize each child’s or student’s potential to generate and hold their own purpose within themselves. To describe development and education in this way is to understand them in terms of *Bildung*—a term indispensable to German understandings of education, both old and new, that denotes development, formation, as well as self-development and self-formation, all at once.

Herman Nohl: The Pedagogical Relation and Educational Reality

Herman Nohl (1879-1960), Eduard Spranger (1882-1963) and Wilhelm Flitner (1889-1990), all students of Dilthey, are often considered the principal representatives of Human Science Pedagogy. They developed a wide range of themes and insights on the basis of Dewey’s nascent conceptions of the human sciences and of pedagogy as one of its disciplines. In an attempt to focus on one particular line of influence that has its beginnings with Dilthey, I look first at Nohl’s conceptions of the “pedagogical relation” and “educational reality.” I then consider how these notions are developed further in the pedagogical theory of, O.F. Bollnow, one of Nohl’s students. I then conclude this part of the paper with an examination of related concepts developed by Klaus Mollenhauer, who, like Nohl and Bollnow, spent a significant part of his time at the University of Göttingen.

Nohl introduces his conception of the pedagogical relation by responding decisively to Schleiermacher’s question about what the older generation wants with the younger. What earlier generations had once “wanted with the younger,” Nohl believed, was no longer sufficient. He rejected what he called the “‘original’ pedagogy of parents and teachers,” which he said, “began with the goals of the teachers, and used coercive means—above all rules and punishments—for their achievement” (1914/1967, p. 27). Education, Nohl insisted, could no longer simply be what parents and teachers wanted for themselves—their goals and ideals, their customs, habits and expectations. Nohl instead wanted to do nothing less than to “turn ... the original relationship” between older and younger “upside down,” and above all, to “elevate the *younger* generation above the *older*” (emphasis added, p. 30). Heavily influenced by the *Reformpädagogik* of his time—the German parallel to early 20th century progressive education—Nohl envisioned a new education, a new pedagogy as one that would “*arise from the perspective of the young*” (1914/1967, p. 27; emphasis in original), which he described it as grounded in “the basic stance” of the educator:

This basic stance ... is decisively characterized by the fact that its perspective is unconditionally that of the child or student. This means that its task is not to draw the child towards... specific, predetermined, objective goals [of] the state, the church, law, the economy Instead, it sees its goal in the subject and his/her physical and *personal* realization or unfolding (*körperlich-geistige Entfaltung*). That this child here comes to his life’s purpose, that is [its] ... autonomous and inalienable task. (1926, p. 152; emphasis added)

Nohl takes Dilthey's emphasis on teleology as a principle for all human development and integrates it with what both Nohl and Biesta identify as the "educational interest." Now we can understand these more precisely not so much as the "want" of the older generation, but as those purposes indwelling in the child him or herself, developed independently from overt pressures of economic or social conformity. The ultimate purpose of the older generation's intentions towards the younger is to awaken purposes among the younger that are, above all, *their own*. The basic stance of the educator, as Nohl puts it, must also take the form of "conscious reserve in the face of the spontaneity and originality of the child." This is a type of engagement that as Nohl explains, is "expressed in its most refined form as pedagogical tact" (1933, p. 22). In this context Nohl famously defines *the pedagogical relation* as one that is a "passionate" or "loving relation between a mature person and one who is becoming, specifically for the sake of the latter, so that he comes to his life and form" (1933, p. 22).

The realization of the child's own life and form, however, is of course not as simple as the adult merely taking on whatever aim or purpose a child might affirm at a given moment. Writing in his famous summary of German humanist education,⁷ *The Pedagogical Movement in Germany and its Theory*, Nohl characterizes the pedagogical relation of teacher and student, educator and youth, as being "doubly determined:" The teacher must of course affirm "the child in his [present] reality," but must always "tactfully" balance this with an affirmation of the future, or as Nohl puts it, of "the goal, the ideal of this child"—what the child *can be* or *become* (1933, p. 24). In education, in sum, current reality and future potentiality must always be kept in balance: "the two are not separated," Nohl insists, "they are a unity" (p. 24). Both the pedagogical relation and the "realm" of education more broadly can thus be said to be marked by a particular temporality: One that is split dialectically between the needs of a concrete present and the possibilities (also demands) of an uncertain future.

Nohl saw education as being split not only between present and future, but also as subject to a dialectic between its objective and subjective aspects. Nohl introduces his conception of "educational reality" in terms of the "double-sidedness of... pedagogical *objectifications* [on the one hand, and] pedagogical *lived experience*" on the other (1959, p. 119; emphasis added). In the case of the first, of objectifications, he says that educational reality represents "a relatively independent cultural system... like art and the economy... a culmination of achievements that runs through history, and that are accrued in [its] institutions, organs and laws" (1959, p. 119). As this paper goes on to show, these institutions and laws include not only theories and techniques that have been amassed for teaching and administration, but physical artefacts as well, such as toys, books and educational images. Speaking of the other, the subjective side of educational reality, Nohl explains that this whole historical cultural and material "objective world" of education "acquires life and meaning only when it constantly connected back with one's own lived pedagogical experience, for example, the intense experiences of own's youth, or one's own pedagogical passion [as a teacher], as well as the moments contained within them" (1959, p. 120).

Educational reality in other words, designates those aspects of our lives and our society that are reflective or expressive of what Biesta, and before him, Schleiermacher, identified as "the educational interest." As Nohl makes clear, this interest goes beyond just individual and also disciplinary intentions and orientations. Instead, it can be seen to constitute an entire "cultural system" that ranges from schooling arrangements through kids' toys and training wheels to books for parents on childrearing. And of course, it includes the many experiences, memories, ideas and feelings that are wrapped up with all of our own biographical engagement with this cultural system. As Nohl's contemporary, Wilhelm Flitner put it, educational reality "*is... all phenomena which can and will always be found in the domain of educational responsibility*" (1983, pp. 27-28; emphasis in original). This idea of education as a domain of adult responsibility—one that brings with it very strong continuities from the past—remains central in the work of Otto Friedrich Bollnow and Klaus Mollenhauer (below) who represent the youngest and last generations of Human Science Pedagogy.

Otto Friedrich Bollnow (1903-1991): The Subjective Side of Educational Reality

Although Nohl's "new education" placed the highest possible expectations and responsibility on parents, teachers and educational institutions, it seems that Nohl himself never asked whether those actually involved in education were equal to the task. His avoidance of this question is all the more remarkable given Nohl's own entanglements with the Nazis. These include, for example, a 1935 afterword for his book on the German pedagogical movement in which he

⁷ I use the term "humanist" here loosely. More accurately, Nohl's book traces precursors and recent developments in the development of an approach to education informed by *Lebensphilosophie*, an approach whose "principal insights were [later] taken up in a methodologically more rigorous and productive way in Husserlian phenomenology and Heidegger's 'philosophy of existence'" (*Lebensphilosophie*, 1998).

called for educators to build up the German people or *Volk* in both their “cultural [*Geistige*] and biological elements” (1935, p. 286). Broadly speaking, Nohl’s Nazi involvements, and the similar dalliances of his student, Bollnow, are comparable to, but much less intensive or consistent than those of Martin Heidegger. Of course, Heidegger’s philosophy remains enormously influential to this day but is also controversial because of his Nazi history. Although the Nazi involvements, particularly of Nohl, are referenced in conversations as one reason for contemporary German neglect of Human Science Pedagogy, it applies only sporadically to the other figures mentioned here. Flitner, for example, positioned himself in consistent opposition to the Nazis and his seminars in Hamburg were one of the meeting places of the White Rose resistance group. Spranger, although politically conservative, also worked in consistent opposition to Nazi influence on academia. Of course, Schleiermacher’s and Dilthey’s lives significantly predated the Nazi period in Germany. The work of those human science pedagogues who were active during this period have been thoroughly documented by German scholars (e.g., Matthes 1998; Klafki & Brockmann 2002; Ortmeyer 2009).

Historically speaking, after the Second World War, it was obvious that the judgment of so many people in positions of responsibility—including education—had been profoundly mistaken and misguided. It was also clear that even the most well-intentioned teacher would have been unable to shield her students from the multiple crises and upheavals that were part of the Nazi era. In this context, Otto Friedrich Bollnow, a student of Nohl’s who had also studied under Heidegger, explored themes of “crisis” and “discontinuity” in educational reality.

Bollnow’s 1959 book on *Existentialism and Pedagogy* begins by making the significant observation that all previous pedagogical theories “were ones of *continuous* education.” Whether such theories principally affirmed the child’s natural growth (e.g. like Rousseau) or saw a more active role for the educator-as-trainer or -mentor (e.g. Kant), they were all based on the presupposition, Bollnow noted, that “continuity and gradual actualization are the basic forms of human development” (p. 18). Growth, of course, is generally understood as a steady and continuous process, as is the learning progress that happens at the hands of a capable teacher. However, with its emphasis on authenticity, Angst, the absurd, encounter and crisis, existentialism shows us that life is never simply an uninterrupted process of self-actualization where everything happens according to plan. After intensive engagement with the existentialism of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, Bollnow realized: “Human life does not basically unfold in a merely ‘organic’ process of growth; rather only by passing through crises does life assume its genuine being” (Bollnow 1987, p. 5). Educational reality, when understood experientially, is thus something necessarily marked by unplannable interruptions, discontinuities, encounters and even crises: “The unplannable requires a special form of care and attention,” Bollnow wrote; as such, he added, it also “plays a significant role in a comprehensive [conception of] educational reality” (1969, p. 49).

The unplannable for Bollnow is exemplified in the existential notion of *crisis*. Crisis for Bollnow refers to a singular or unique event that affects the whole person; “it forces the subject to rethink his situation and to orient himself anew” (1959, p. 99). This event can take the form of the loss of a loved one, a severe illness, a brush with death, a family breakup, etc. Such a personal reorientation, often forced on the life of a student, is not simply to be met by jejune optimism or superficial melioration by the teacher. Instead it requires a similarly personal response. As phrases like “productive failure” and the “teachable moment” might suggest, in moments of discontinuity and crisis, teachers have the chance to find new pedagogical and interpersonal possibilities. As Bollnow puts it, they have an opportunity to show

that the crisis is not an accidental error but is instead a condition for the further progression of [a young person’s] development. Directly from the confrontation of the crisis comes a pedagogical result. We should not shy away from this opportunity, but we should rather help the young students to overcome their difficulty with as much honesty and resolve as we are able to muster. (1975, 49)

Again, educational engagement is not a matter of abstract rules or guidelines—or even “best” or “evidence-based practices. Instead, it is about engaging with another as a unique person—an encounter in which student and teacher “meet... each other” (Langeveld, 1983, p. 6). Like Schleiermacher before him, Bollnow sees this type of encounter as instead a question of relying on one’s capacity for reflection and self-reflection, in

both professional and personal terms. In such contexts, the practitioner relies neither on

concrete advice nor on ready-made programs, but rather on the increased awareness of one's actions and the broadening of one's perspectives. [In this context, the teacher is to be] freed from capriciousness and [made] aware of the deeper connections within educational practice. Through this awareness, he learns to understand his actions better and how to see them through in specific situations. (1969, p. 48)

Finally, Bollnow's approach to "discontinuity" and to the subjective side of education have been recently rediscovered and reinterpreted by scholars of education and learning in both Germany and the English-speaking world (e.g., Koskela 2012; English, 2013; Agostini 2016; Laros, Fuhr & Taylor, 2017; Rödel 2018). At a time when "crisis" remains indispensable in our political and personal vocabularies, both English- and German-language scholars have found in Bollnow's Human Science Pedagogy, or what he also referred to as "hermeneutic pedagogy,"⁸ a way of understanding the discontinuities both in one's life-course and also in the moment-by-moment events of learning.

Klaus Mollenhauer 1926-1996: The Objective Side of Educational Reality

Born a generation after Bollnow, Klaus Mollenhauer was educated by a number of Nohl's former students in Göttingen. However, Mollenhauer began his career by sharply rejecting the Human Science Pedagogy of his teachers, saying that "the years since the Second World War have shown that [this] pedagogy is limited in its ability to shed light on those circumstances which constitute the reality of education" (1968, p. 9). However, as his reference to "the reality of education" suggests, even in his rejection of Human Science Pedagogy, Mollenhauer was still deeply influenced by notions like educational reality, the pedagogical relation and more. This influence is also indicated by his response when asked about an underlying theme in his life's work: "I can only say [or ask], with Schleiermacher: 'What does the older generation want with the younger?'" (Mollenhauer, as quoted in Kaufmann, Lütgert, Schulze & Schweitzer 1991, p. 85). By examining "educational reality" as a field of inter-generational engagement from both historical and experiential perspectives, Mollenhauer—particularly in his final monograph, *Forgotten Connections: On Culture and Upbringing* (2013)—came to understand adult exercises of their responsibility for children's upbringing as taking two general forms. The first of these, both in individual and collective history, is called *presentation*, and the second, Mollenhauer designates *re-presentation*. Starting with this distinction, Mollenhauer develops a method for the analysis of the objective historical and cultural aspects of educational reality that was leveraged by many German scholars in his wake (e.g., Grutschka 2004; Benner 2015).

"Presentation" refers to the way that we, in our words, habits and actions, "cannot avoid embodying an adult way of life in front of children; like any adult, [we] powerfully exemplify one way of life or another" (p. 8). In this sense, pedagogical practice is obviously something that precedes theory: What we say, how we act, who we are, and also what we *don't* do all provide rich material for young children's abilities to learn through observation, imitation, repetition, variation and practice. This process is exemplified historically or "objectively" in Figure 1, a 15th century woodcut showing an "educational reality" in which parents are engaged in farm and domestic work directly in the presence of their infant child. There are no books, walls or windows to separate, or as Mollenhauer says, "compartmentalize" their activities—which in this case include breastfeeding, yarn making and cultivating the soil. Here education, as the influence of the older on the younger, unfolds largely unconsciously as a "seamless whole."



Figure 1: An example of "presentation" in the Middle Ages. Farm family working, woodcut, ca. 1476. As Mollenhauer points out, it "depict[s] all members of the family (father, mother and child) working and the children can clearly see the work that is being done" (Mollenhauer 2013, p. 25; Morgan Pierpont Library; used with permission).

⁸ See Bollnow's 1989 Theory and Practice in Education, available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333295910_Bollnow_1988_Theory_and_Practice_in_Education

“Adults, children and the work being undertaken,” Mollenhauer explains, appear as “complete units of meaning,” (p. 31). And a similar seamlessness would likely characterize the child’s gradual integration into their parents’ way of life in this scenario—to eventually become a farmer, father or mother themselves.

However, as time passes historically—and also in the experience of today’s children as they grow up—ways of life become increasingly differentiated and compartmentalized. Instead of the world at home serving as a kind of microcosm of the world at large, children are sent off to school, to learn *about* the world—rather than to experience it directly. Historically, this change is particularly prominent at the time of the Renaissance and Reformation. “The entire pedagogic landscape of Europe radically changed,” as Mollenhauer observes:

the ground rules according to which [educational] reality is constructed for children are not simply changed; instead, a whole new system ... emerges. Culture is ... presented to the child... only in part. The part that is ... [available] is offered through a kind of pedagogical rehearsal or practice, as it would be for someone from a foreign land... One could say that for the past three centuries, education has been a matter of “reproducing” the world in stylized images and that schooling as we know it today is a massively aesthetic, symbolic undertaking. (p. 31)

This pedagogical “rehearsal” or “practice” meant that children began to learn not only by being directly exposed or directly presented with all aspects of the lives of the older generation. Instead these aspects started to be *re-presented indirectly* through images, printing and the types of objects and arrangements (e.g. blackboards, books and desks) appropriate to the school. And these “objective” arrangements are ones that have persisted to the present day: “We long ago accepted that the realm of schooling consists of a huge montage of images and representations which are not ‘the things themselves’ but that instead ‘point out’ things and phenomena” (p. 34). It is still through a huge montage of images and representations, boards and screens, other words, that the learning of the younger generation is mediated by the older. The symbolic, representational and even aesthetic significance of school has been developed further by scholars such as Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons (e.g. Masschelein & Simons 2010; Masschelein & Simons 2013), and the “material” arrangements of education and the classroom, meanwhile, have also become a matter of great contemporary interest (e.g. Reh & Wilde 2016; Brooks & Waters 2017).

Finally, Mollenhauer not only worked historically by using engravings and related images; more than any of the 20th century scholars covered thus far in this paper, he returned to Dilthey’s idea of the autobiography as “the highest and most instructive form of the understanding of life” (Dilthey 2002, p. 221). After spending most of his career using the discourse of theoretical sociology, Mollenhauer came to see famous autobiographical texts like Kafka’s *Letter to his Father* and Augustine’s *Confessions* as providing a far more meaningful language and frame of reference for thinking about education:

I found I was able to arrive at a better language for studying education and upbringing when I read more, say, of Franz Kafka’s educational text [his *Letter to his Father*]. Or the extraordinary care that Augustine takes in his writings [or *Confessions*]. These are exercises in the *Bildung* of the self (*Selbstbildung*).... They allow one to constantly monitor one’s own language, to test the relevance of that about which one is speaking, and to see the degree to which one is simply stating “theorems.” (1991, p. 81)



Figure 2: Books, walls and windows contain or compartmentalize different aspects of life: The roles of male and female are clearly separated as is the private (the domestic space of the house) and the public arena (e.g., travellers visible through the window). Children no longer learn from what is presented to them directly in the world as a seamless whole; instead, their mother simply gives them “their breakfast before sending them off to school” (Mollenhauer 2013, p. 30; Berlin Kupferstichkabinett, Preussische Kulturstiftung).

Autobiography, in other words, provides exemplary exercises in education, in the formation of one's own self, in one's self-cultivation and self-understanding. Just as for Dilthey, one can say that for Mollenhauer, (auto)biographical writing represents the most direct expression about one's existence and one's path through life. But autobiography for Mollenhauer is more than that: It also provides a kind of touchstone for reflection on education—to ensure that this reflection does not become an abstract exercise (or a matter for simplistic theorems), but rather remains focused on the ongoing pleasures and struggles of (self-)development, change and renewed (self-)understanding. Consequently, his *Forgotten Connections* is full of autobiographical excerpts and examples: It begins with a substantial quote from and reflection on Kafka's *Letter*, and proceeds through Augustine's *Confessions* to biographical and autobiographical writing on figures as varied as the famous foundling Kaspar Hauser, Swiss educator J.H. Pestalozzi and Austrian author Thomas Bernhard. Indeed, one can go so far as to say that it is these biographical encounters that are primary in Mollenhauer's book and that Mollenhauer's own writing in it is actually secondary (see: Friesen 2014 p. xiii).

Conclusion

Through an overview of select figures and themes from German pedagogical thought this paper has illustrated how education can indeed be understood as a "*Geisteswissenschaft*"—as *neither* a collection of processes to be instrumentalized through the application of sociology or psychology *nor* as a site of the more-or-less arbitrary exercise of power ripe for political *critique*. Instead it has pointed to ways in which education can be understood, as Biesta has said, "as an academic discipline in its own right, with its own forms of theory and theorizing and its own intellectual and social infrastructure" (p. 14). It has shown that this is a discipline that can be understood as having its own phenomenal domain—namely the domain of adult responsibility for the younger, and of the young's own experience of growing (in the sense of both of *Erlebnis* and autobiography), all of which is simultaneously captured in the phrase "educational reality." It has also indicated this to be a discipline that brings with it its own conception of action and interaction—one framed by the *pedagogical relation* and understood specifically in terms of *tact*. Additionally, it has indicated how this discipline can be said to imply its own epistemology and ontology, one that is explicitly *interpretive* rather than (*post*-)*positivistic*, and one that is personal, interpersonal, and existential in nature. Finally, this paper has shown that the theory generated in and through this domain embraces not only the methods of a lifeworld-oriented dialectics, hermeneutics and phenomenology, but also a rather more quotidian, ongoing *ethical reflection upon practice*, to ensure that under constantly changing conditions and demands, "the older generation... [is] aware of what it is doing and why it is doing it" (Schleiermacher 1926/2000, p. 11).

In drawing this paper to its conclusion, I briefly revisit the "strange case" of Human Science Pedagogy outlined in this paper's introduction. I address ongoing work in English-speaking world that are relevant to the human sciences and provide some observations on challenges in connecting it with contemporary work in German-speaking Europe.

Concomitant with the calls of Gert Biesta and Max van Manen to "reconsider education as a *Geisteswissenschaft*"—as "an ethics-sensitive language of teaching and [a particular] epistemology of practice"—an increasing number of German texts are appearing in English, along with an increasing number of original English-language texts that are either directly related to Human Science Pedagogy or that address the broader philosophical and cultural tradition in which it has its roots. Examples of the former include this author's own translation of Mollenhauer's *Forgotten Connections*, of Ralf Koerrenz's *Existentialism and Education: An Introduction to O.F. Bollnow*, and his up-coming co-translation of Schleiermacher's *On Education* from 1826. Examples of the latter might include Andrea English's *Discontinuity in Learning: Dewey, Herbart and Education as Transformation*, Rebecca Horlacher's *The Educated Subject and the German Concept of Bildung: A Comparative Cultural History*. Dilthey's *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences* (2010)—as well as more familiar classics such as Heidegger's *Being and Time* and Gadamer's *Truth and Method*—which also offer substantial potential for developing deeper understandings of education as a *Geisteswissenschaft*.

Certainly having some of these—and a number of yet-untranslated texts—in mind, Gert Biesta has argued eloquently for "the need for academic bilingualism in education:"⁹ The "ability to converse across two very different traditions of educational theory and theorising" (p. 31) Biesta warns, however, of the significant difficulty of cultivating such bilingualism: [It] is not simply [a matter] of translating German texts into English—although this maybe important as well and it is actually remarkable how little this has been done so far—but much more about bringing two significantly different educational vocabularies into conversation with each other. To do this effectively, requires

⁹ Biesta references German-language texts such as Oelkers (2004) and Wulf (1978).

an ability to converse in both vocabularies. The task of translation is, after all, never one of replacing words with other words but is about the transformation of one system of meaning into another system of meaning. (p. 31)

In speaking of “the transformation of one system of meaning into another,” Biesta is putting his finger on the central challenge implied in his call for academic bilingualism in education. This challenge is one that goes well beyond matters of vocabulary—regardless of the depth and subtlety with which individual terms may be understood—and extends to the way that various terms (both specialized and more commonplace) are interrelated to form what has been referred to as a *Denkstil* or “style of thought” (Fleck 2011). Thinking back to Dilthey’s original conceptions of the human sciences, these include dialectical, hermeneutic and phenomenological sensibilities or habits—ones that are inclined to see education not in terms of explanations or abstract linear processes, but rather, in terms of understandings, tensions and paradoxes, and of the qualities and textures of everyday experience.

These terms also include, of course, the founding relational tension between the older and the younger generation (identified by Schleiermacher), the nuances of possible experiences of these types of relations (identified by Nohl and developed by Bollnow) and how these nuances and tensions are negotiated and articulated through culture (as highlighted by Mollenhauer). These broadly educational, cultural and humanistic themes and the sensibilities associated with them also entail not so much an ever more precise understanding, say, of “*Erziehung*” “*Bildung*” or “*Pädagogik*” as *termini technici*, but rather a feeling for the varying ways in which they can be used—for what might be called their “constitutive ambiguity” (e.g. Friesen, in press). Such a feeling or sensibility could not be further from dominant English-language constructions of a field which borrows freely from disciplines which render education in terms of abstract processes (e.g. learning, delivery, acculturation and indoctrination) and their evaluation in terms of individual “achievement” and “outcomes.” As a result, to obtain an appreciable level of what Biesta calls “academic bilingualism,” a process of unlearning and relearning almost seems necessary, one which, in keeping with the hermeneutic nature of the human sciences, seems to occur most profitably in the context of ongoing dialogue—a viewpoint consistent with my own experience.¹⁰

As made clear above, however, German-speaking scholars would also insist on much more: They have said it is insufficient to simply take on an understanding of education that remains relatively unchanged from the Weimar and Nazi eras. They also make it clear that approaches to education need to be adequate to the requirements of a pluralistic, postmodern and multicultural society—for example, one where heterogeneity of lifeworld experiences greatly complicate the intersubjective intricacies of an enactment of the pedagogical relation or of pedagogical tact (e.g., see: Friesen 2017).

However, this has not prevented German scholars from continuing to see a figure like Schleiermacher as one of “the founders of pedagogy as a discipline” (e.g. Böhm & Seichter, 2018, p. 413)—with his central question of “what the older generation actually wants with the younger” still standing as an valid delimitation of its disciplinary boundaries. It has also not prevented a number of Dilthey’s individual “human science disciplines” from living on in some form in German education scholarship to this day: These include “phenomenologically-oriented educational studies” (e.g., Brinkmann 2019), “pedagogical anthropology” (e.g., Wolf & Zirfas 2016), studies of “educational biography research” (e.g., Krüger & Marotzki 2014). The key human science method of hermeneutics, for its part, can be said to pervade all of these approaches, rather than being singled out as separate from them. From an English-language perspective, these approaches are also remarkable in that none of their principal texts (including those just cited) are written in or have been translated into English.

Biesta’s call for “academic bilingualism” can thus be seen to be applicable, in different ways, to both sides of the Atlantic. Both English and German-speaking scholars engaged with general “theory” in the field of education, I believe, could work toward their mutual benefit by cultivating this bilingualism. My purpose in this paper has thus been twofold: To encourage a reconsideration of education on specifically *educational* terms—as an interested, intergenerational, human, cultural-historical enterprise that strives towards greater self-awareness of what it is doing and why it is doing it. To this end, I have sketched for English-language readers a way of thinking about education as an affirmative, non-instrumental and non-psychological account of education and upbringing. For German readers, I

¹⁰ I have had the pleasure of engaging in such sustained dialogue with people including Jens Beljan (Jena), Malte Brinkmann (Berlin), Karsten Kenklies (Strathclyde), Anja Kraus (Stockholm) and Hanno Su (Münster), as well as with a group of American scholars whose collaboration I co-lead with Rose Ylimaki (North Carolina): Daniel Castner (Indiana), Todd Price (National Lewis) and Lemuel Watson (Indiana).

have not only worked to encourage greater bilingualism and internationalization; I also suggest how some central ideas from the German tradition have been received and interpreted in a foreign-language context, and make the case that there is a hunger for more.

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