

Phenomenological Notes

Pedagogy and Neoliberalism: Reflections on an Interview with Jan Masschelein

Trond Sandvik
NLA Høgskolen, Norway
Email: trosan@online.no

As part of my Masters of Pedagogy thesis work, I explored freedom and pedagogical freedom (Sandvik, 2019). I was afforded the opportunity to interview Professor Jan Masschelein, and the focus guiding our talk was pedagogical freedom. This conversation was not only informative for my research in pedagogy, but I found Masschelein's words to have a direct impact on my work as a secondary teacher in the Norwegian public-school system. My teaching specialization is mainly with pupils who are struggling academically, who are socially in trouble, who are challenged to manage school life, and who are most often referred to as *at-risk youth*.

At the centre of my work with youth is the pedagogical and that includes how teachers can educate and help students in a broader sense. My central role as a teacher is to help my students answer questions that are important to them: What shall become of me? What shall I do with my life? What is valuable and can give me meaningful direction in my life? I believe that these existential, and difficult questions offer so many possible answers, and some answers are often conflicted by mixed messages coming from peers, media, and social networks. This contributes to making school life for many young people difficult. At the centre of my discussions with my students is the impression that you have to succeed in so many, almost impossible ways in life, in order to have a life worth living. In many ways these impressions often lock students and teachers into a narrative that leaves them hostage to an uncertain future.

My research focused on this precarious predicament of guiding youth to become who they are in society and helping them find a way to navigate the possibilities and constraints, that often confront them in public school. The expectation is that youth fulfil the state requirements to become contributing and productive citizens of Norway. This expectation is critical for all educators and their pupils, not just at-risk youth, considering the educational shifts over the last decade. Schooling has become a process of managerial controls, decisions driven by budgetary constraints, and narrow academic standards determining a youth's place in the world—all this due to a strong almost unstoppable force in society towards individualism. It is an attitude that everything we do should be useful, be beneficial in ways we can predict in advance. It is adopting the neoliberal mantra of "What's in it for me."

Hence, schools have become agents of the state and this is curtailing a teacher's practice and pedagogical freedoms. This was one of the thoughts already troubling me when I went to Brussels to interview Jan Masschelein, a member and former leader of the Laboratory of Education and Society, and of the research-group of Education, Culture and Society.

I conducted the interview with Masschelein in June 2018, in Brussels, Belgium, at the University KU Leuven (Louvain). I was hoping that our discussion would reveal answers to questions that have been plaguing my practice as a researching teacher: where does pedagogy fit in a neoliberal world? Better yet, can pedagogical practices even exist in neoliberal times?

Prior to this interview, my starting point was Arendt's (2006) book, *Between Past and Future*. The book assisted in efforts to establish my stance on action, education, and in particular, freedom. Arendt (2006) writes:

Man does not possess freedom so much as he, or better his coming into the world, is equated with the appearance of freedom in the universe; man is free because he is beginning and was so created after the universe had already come into existence.... In the birth of each man this initial beginning is reaffirmed, because in each instance something new comes into an already existing world which will continue to exist after each individual's death. Because he *is* a beginning, man can begin; to be human and to be free are one and the same. God created man in order to introduce into the world the faculty of beginning: freedom. (pp. 165–166)

I was not able to arrive at answers to satisfy my research or quell the concerns I had as a schoolteacher. I wanted to understand more deeply. Arendt (2006) challenged my thinking about pedagogy and the looming threats due to neoliberalism. Thus, I began asking deeper questions: What is freedom? How can we understand freedom? How can a particular way of understanding freedom be relevant and meaningful to pedagogy in practice?

In seeking answers to these timeless, and situated questions, I discovered Masschelein's works: *The World Once More...But Not (Yet) Finished* (2011a); *In Defence of the School, a Public Issue* (2013); *Philosophy of Education as an Exercise in Thought*; and *To Not Forget Oneself When 'Things Take Their Course* (2011b). Reading these works in advance of the interview helped me position my own pedagogical beliefs, but also confirmed for me that education is in crises; the politics of today do threaten pedagogical practices that have been shared inter-generationally. The following abridged and adapted version of the Masschelein interview (see Sandvik, 2019) has only affirmed the broader pedagogical concerns occurring in Norway, and the implications this has for teachers globally. I structured the interview based on the pedagogical questions asked in Brussels, followed by Masschelein's responses. Masschelein states that his thoughts regarding pedagogical freedom are due to a close and intense collaboration with his co-writer, Maarten Simons. At the end of the interview, I reflect on our conversation by critically examining the pedagogical-neoliberal realities facing Norwegian teachers.

What is pedagogical freedom?

There is a distinction between political freedom and pedagogical freedom; the notion of freedom in a pedagogical context is a very special one. It is not about being free in the sense of the possibility to having an opinion, the possibility to intervene in a political discussion or in a political debate or the possibility to do what you want. It is not about choice. It is related to this idea that education should be distinguished from initiation and socialisation. That education is about going to school – not as the institution, but as a kind of pedagogical form that is always starting from the assumption that there is no natural, no pre-given, predefined connection between a body, capacities and positions; social positions – there is no predestination. Pedagogical freedom is a kind of freedom to form one's self, that everybody can learn everything. In the sense that it is not predefined what the body, or any-body (and mind), is able to do. It is not naturally pre-given what you have to or can learn. In that sense, everybody can learn everything. There is a kind of freedom which is related to the possibility of shaping one's life, together with others. It is kind of a starting point, and then we see how far we get. Freedom and equality are closely connected. The equality part is the assumption that everybody is able to begin with something. It's not

about the choice to live the kind of life that you want, but it's the possibility to do things, to give a shape to your life, even without knowing in what direction it would take you. Choice always seems to imply that you have a kind of knowledge about what you choose. But formation, or form one's self, to shape, to give shape to one's self is not about a particular choice, but to be prepared for any choice.

What is “good” about freedom? Why do we need it? What is it for?

Pedagogical freedom is something that is of value. Value is not something that you choose and that you have reasons for, but in a sense the opposite – that you are chosen, you find yourself in a value. The pedagogical is not ethical, it's not political, it's not the same. Pedagogical freedom is, to some extent, related to the way Hannah Arendt writes about a radical freedom; it accepts the possibility of evil and error in a radical sense. In Arendt terms, freedom is more about the beginning, this act of the beginning...that is an interruption of the chain of causes and effects. Arendt is also saying: “You don't know what you are doing” and that action always is related to the other in the world. You can never act alone. That's the reason why you have forgiveness, care and all these other things. The assumption of freedom, is accepting the possibility to be at the wrong place, to make mistakes; in a certain sense, we really don't know what we are doing or to phrase it more precise with the words of Foucault, we know what we are doing, but we don't know what our doings do. Pedagogical freedom is a kind of freedom that has no rules. We have to start from the acceptance of the beginning, as a beginning without knowing our direction.

What is freedom and morals?

Freedom in a pedagogical sense, is not an ideal; the goal is not that you should become free, or we should become free. Freedom is not the kind of ideal that we would have to strive for in that sense. Freedom (and equality) are the assumptions which are articulated in school, in educational practice. If you want to give reasons for the importance of pedagogical freedom it is, in Arendt's terms, the possibility of the renewal of the world, but even that is not a real justification. It's more an appeal to something that is important. Arendt would probably say; out of love for the world. You cannot give justification for that. Education is about implying this double love, it's a love for the world, the love for the new generation that can regenerate the world.

But still we are fighting against things that can diminish and restrict our freedom; pedagogical freedom is threatened by the way that learning environments today are organized and function. That is precisely why we have to defend the school. The school is constantly under attack; by new approaches that are trying to reintroduce “the pre-given,” “you are such and such,” and the most popular today is talent: “what is your talent, we want to develop your talent, you have to develop your talent.” This is precisely the opposite of what school is about. The school is not about fixating (narrowing) what you can do, and thereby making a profile. It's not about giving you more and more of the same (which we know you like – because you have chosen this before, because it is in your profile) school is precisely the opposite and about breaking these kinds of links, these kinds of connections. That's at least one of the

reasons to defend school: that we start from the assumption of freedom, and not from the assumption that you are such and such, born such and such. To expect that the school does not accept to give up so easily; give up because someone says: “but I don’t like this” or “this is nothing for me,” “I cannot do this...the answer is (can be...),” and “that may be true, but come on, let us give it a try, let’s close the door and then we are going to look at it together.” That is what school is about; it is about exposing you to the world, so that the world can get meaning for you. Not that you can find yourself. That’s not to say that finding yourself cannot be important, but that the school is not the place to do that. School is about disclosing the world. Disclosing the world in order to give the new generation possibility, to fall in love with something; to be confronted with something.

What is suspension and profanation?

Suspension and profanation come in a certain sense together. Suspension means to put out of effect, temporarily. That means that you are not destroying anything, or denying anything. For example, that you are coming out of a certain family, that you are of a certain context, [and] that you have a certain background. We don’t deny this, and we don’t forget about it. But, in school, we put that temporarily out of effect. And how do we do that? We do that by making you attentive to something so that you forget about it. At that moment, we are forgetting about it and instead we are dealing with something that is on the table. At that moment it is possible that you can have an experience of - I can begin with something. But this has to be repeated again and again. It’s not just one revolutionary act and now you forget your past. But there are moments where we forget about outside school, where we forget about our past. These moments can possibly make a change. This is a suspension; the suspension is not saying “and now I suspend,” the suspension happens; school happens. It means you organize an encounter, and that encounter can make school happen, this can create a gap in time, to use again the notions of Arendt. That there is a gap between past and future, so that the past is not defining the future, that there is a rupture, so that the school is a kind of **free-time**. You have the course of time from the past to the future. Suspension is when school is happening. And it is a shared moment.

School is always about taking care of the new generation. But precisely in order to take care of the new generation, you have to take care of the world. And to take care of the world, is in a way more important than the care for the new generation. Or more precisely, you give the possibility to the new generation by saying “you are not the most important.” And that is precisely the responsibility of the older generation; to bring about what we should care about, what it is worth caring about, what it is important to put on the table.

We also have a very popular goal in the schools nowadays; learning how to learn. Which is not concerning what we are actually doing, which is bringing us out of the world. Learning how to learn, is saying that nothing is important. That’s saying that you don’t have to attach to anything. Because you don’t know if it is going to be useful, so you don’t have to attach. The only thing you have to do is learn – that’s indeed denying the world.

What are the disadvantages with the idea of freedom—the price of freedom?

The price of freedom is to accept the errors and to accept that the new generation can radically question what *we* value. The price to freedom is to accept that you don't know. It is always risky. If you don't accept the risks, there is no possibility for action; you cannot act. But without freedom you can definitely achieve more efficiency. Results. The same is the price for democracy – democracy can be slow and ineffective. But effectiveness is not the reason for democracy, but perhaps the reason is that democracy can be more just? More valuable? That is why we defend freedom in school (pedagogical freedom), that is why we defend democracy; because it is related to freedom and equality and these are valuable to us. Even if learning without school would be more efficient (you don't need a school to learn). But maybe you need school because the school is a particular kind of learning that is related to society and to what happens in society in a particular way. That is something totally different. That's not because it is efficient and effective learning. Because it is clearly not! If you want to learn language, for instance to learn Spanish in order to be able to use it practically, you don't have to go to the school, you can for example go to Spain and learn it through practice, that will probably be more efficient. But if you want to study Spanish, then you have to deal with its grammar...that is where school comes in.

What is the goal with pedagogical freedom?

Today, *Bildung* is becoming a more and more used expression, also in English. There is no real good translation to English, the nearest would probably be formation. And, it is about shaping oneself, form oneself, but I don't like so much the notion because *Bildung* has its own history.

I think it is important to try to articulate what is pedagogical. And not to reduce it either to the moral or ethical, to the political, or the psychological. And the pedagogical is not yet so precisely formulated, but that is what we (Maarten Simons and Jan Masschelein), want to do. In a certain sense, the pedagogical is about, constantly being in the place of disorder. This may be the opposite of what people usually think, that pedagogical is about creating order and creating social order and order in your life. The pedagogical is precisely the moment where the order is disrupted, where something is opened up. The pedagogical has in a way always an element of love. And probably love is something that disrupts, the classical stories of love are those that disrupt the social order. You are not allowed to marry that girl or that boy – love disrupts. It has to do with love for the world. And if you start to talk in terms of moral you always try to reintroduce some order; some rules or some norms. And I think that the pedagogical is anarchic.

Is there any room for morality in pedagogical practice?

If we consider the difference between the ethical and moral, ethics refers to ethic rules and the moral is more in the moment, where you meet the other, and where you perhaps never can be totally prepared for the future you are facing. In a situation that calls for you, and where it is possible to act *right*, if you are able to see – to see what is

given in the actual situation. Where the moral even can collide with ethics, because ethics will always in a way be general. And it would be impossible for anyone to tell you what is right, because no other can really be in your situation. Perhaps it is even important to have the opportunity to come into these moral situations; not because it is useful, but because it has some value to us. In this sense, I believe that there can be an element of ethics, also in the pedagogical: in a certain sense there is something that asks you to take it into account. But you don't know what, exactly. You don't know how exactly, and you have to find a way to do it. There is something that is out of my control, that is asking me to do the right thing, and I have to find out what the right thing is. I can't read it anywhere, and I can't see it anywhere – what the right thing is, what I should do. So, I have to find it. I think education is about trying to constantly prepare yourself in a certain sense to ask – what is the right thing to say? What is the right move? And you cannot know the answer in advance, there is no right method, no prescription. The method is in the first place something to protect the one that is using the method.

Pedagogy vs Neoliberalism

I am a teacher, and my practice is steeped in pedagogy. My research focus, and purpose of the interview, was to explore pedagogical freedom. Then how does neoliberalism, a global movement, come into play with the lessons from the interview with Masschelein? Where is the intersection between the pedagogic and neoliberalism? At first, these seemed to be opposing forces, and foreign to me, a strange collision of thoughts considering I am not an economist. But then a realization, this merger is exactly what I care about. How pedagogical practices are being eroded and practice is being held hostage to global forces of neoliberalism is of great concern to me. It is something that I really care about as a teacher, as a researcher and as a human being facing the pressures of neoliberalism.

The Juncture

Neoliberalism (new-liberalism) is a construction, which had its resurgence in the 1980's, associated with the politics of especially Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain and Ronald Reagan in the United States.¹ Mydske, Claes, and Lie (2007) state that New-liberalism, in a way is liberalism new born, and that it is a loose set of political perceptions which claim that the only legitimate role for the state, is to ensure the individual freedom for each human being, is economic freedom. Therefore, the state should not disturb the individual's enterprises and involvement in them should be reduced to a minimum, because the market would simply be regulating itself. The belief is also that this self-regulating mechanism of the market will be the most effective way to allocate the society's resources. The view is also that this will be most beneficial for the individual's opportunities for self-realization. Models or principles from the private sector can, and should advantageously be used in the public area, in schools for instance. The differences between the private market and the public sphere, are blurred toned down in the neoliberalistic way of thinking. Mydske, Claes, and Lie (2007) point that New Public Management (NPM) is a reform which is inspired by a New-liberal way of thinking. NPM is characterized with its focus on

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/neoliberalism>

competition in the free market, emphasizing scorecards, specializing of roles, with a focus on efficiency, and the end result.

Pedagogy, on the other hand, is an old European term, and has to do with the upbringing of children, “the process of becoming human” (Biesta, 2011, p.189). What is the contrast between pedagogy and neoliberalism? What is the relationship between them? Within educational science, according to Biesta (2011) there are different traditions; an old European Continental tradition and a newer Anglo-American tradition. Biesta (2011) points to the fact that pedagogical practice primarily originates from the Continental tradition and one of its “roots” is a term from the German “*Erziehung*” (p. 185). In English, this can be translated to mean education. Yet, there are a range of different understandings of *Erziehen*. Oelkers (as cited in Biesta, 2011, p. 184) informs us that there is always an expectation specific to three important characteristics: 1) There is a focus on the moral; 2) It is always about relations between people; and 3) It has to do with an asymmetric relation, between a child and an adult (p. 184).

Masschelein and Simons (2013) write about another typical pedagogical feature (from the Continental tradition) – *Bildung*, in German – translated to *formation* in English. Formation should not be confused with learning, but one typical feature about formation is that it (often) leads to learning (p. 45). *Bildung* is about “coming into the world,” by being attentive, by caring for something, by being engaged in some kind of phenomena of the world, and by being exposed to something (Masschelein & Simons, 2013, pp. 45–46). Formation is an attempt at drawing attention away from *me*, from selves, from egos, in a care for something that is common to us all – becoming within humanity. Formation is an invitation, and an expectation towards students to care for something that is outside themselves, for something bigger, more important than our own needs and egocentric desires, and about being sensitive to the world. In practice, this is the students’ (and teachers’) attempt to leave self-catered motives behind, seizing an opportunity to escape from selves – to forget a little, and to be invited to *see* what is good by attending to, by caring for, and by trying to create a common interest about something in a shared moment and in shared interest with other people. This is a real educational challenge, the pedagogical challenge: to show the world, to present it in ways that can make *us* care about things, and in ways that are meaningful. Masschelein and Simons (2013) warn us about one of the accepted trends in education today: the “*the taming of the school*” (p. 92). I interpret this as a neoliberal ideal, where focus is maintained at the pupils’ self, keeping the pupils’ needs in the centre.

The taming of the school, means ensuring that students are kept small – by making them believe that they are the centre of attention, that their personal experiences are the fertile ground for a new world and that the only things that have value are the things they value...and in this way the school is tamed and the student becomes a slave to his own needs, a tourist in his own life world. (Masschelein & Simons, 2013, p. 92)

Saevi (2016) says that the focus within pedagogic practice is on questions about existence, related to help children becoming democratic, autonomic, and authoritative persons who again can give others the same opportunity (p. 345).

The Pedagogic is Concerned with Moral

The pedagogic aims to be moral, and I believe that in pedagogical practice, there is a belief in the importance of presenting life and the world to children as moral dilemmas. This includes important questions that have no readymade answers, no obvious solutions, leaving children to figure life out. Masschelein and Simons (2013) emphasize that there is always an

element of love in the pedagogic, referring to Arendt (2006, 2012, 2018), who is clear in claiming the older generations' responsibility is to *present* the world, openly, in ways that are interesting, in an effort to give meaning and sense, to care, and to show a love for the world (p. 67). This should inspire all of us to use our senses, to feel, to be attentive to what we experience here and now. And only by showing this love for the world and trying to bring the new generation into the world, can the older generation love the younger generation. But still, the older generation simply does not have all the answers – these cannot simply be read somewhere. This orientation leaves it to us to find it out for ourselves. All the time in our lives we meet questions, problems, and tasks that no rule can explain totally or can instruct us how to solve. We can perhaps never be totally prepared. Although Masschelein claims in the interview that he will not reduce the pedagogic “either to the moral or ethical,” (see Sandvik, 2019, p. 144) what he says undoubtedly resembles a moral content in pedagogy:

So, I have to do the right thing, but I don't know if that is to go to left or the right, or whatever. I don't know; but at the moment I have to find a way, and I can try to prepare myself – to be in the moment. But of course, I can still go in the wrong direction. There is something that is out of my control, that is asking me to do the right thing, and I have to find out what the right thing is. I can't read it anywhere, and I can't see it anywhere – what the right thing is, what I should do. So, I have to find it. I think education is about trying to constantly prepare yourself in a certain sense to – what is the right thing to say? What is the right move? And you cannot know the answer in advance, there is no right method, no prescription. The method is in the first place something to protect the one that is using the method. (see Sandvik, 2019, p. 145)

However, the moral is a slippery slope, because how do we teach pupils to act morally, beside from trying to direct attention to what is good? Bauman (2009) explains:

In a moral relationship, all the “duties” and “rules” that may be conceived are addressed solely to me, bind only me, constitute me and me alone as an “I”. When addressed to me, responsibility is moral. It may well lose its moral content completely the moment I try to turn it around to bind the Other. (p. 50)

When we attempt to push our morals on to others, it is simply not moral anymore, this effort has changed the moral into something different. At best, if presented very subtly, our claim or suggestion about what the other should do, could perhaps appear and be interpreted as ethical. In many cases, when my morality is expected to apply to my neighbour, it will simply be plain moralism.

Which ethical rules exist in the capitalist world, in the so called free market, and in the domain of neoliberalism? This question of the ethical is important when considering the moral dimensions that are associated with teaching. Being moral, according to Bauman (2009) is taking a responsibility for my fellow human being. A responsibility that sometimes can be demanding, as I may have to sacrifice something that is dear to me. This also embraces a responsibility for the world, for the community, for other species, and for the environment. In short, these responsibilities are often made secondary and pushed aside for economic considerations associated with neoliberalism.

Why is it Important to Separate Pedagogy from Neoliberalism?

By asking this question I am revealing what teachers should be fighting for. Biesta (2011) accentuates that the idea behind an independent pedagogic, first had to do with the intention to “liberate it from its dependence on ethics which early on served as a foundation for the normative Pädagogik and psychology” (p. 187). Yet, in order to establish the pedagogic, as a scientific discipline, scientists within human science (*geisteswissenschaftliche*

Pädagogik), combined pedagogic and educational practice. The point was that pedagogy should have a supportive role in the field of education, a protection against forces in society, like the church, the state and economic interests, capitalism, neoliberalism, including the NPM drive. Biesta (2011) also states that we must protect “the domain of childhood more generally” (p. 187).

Saevi (2016) claims that through political, economic and educational deals, like the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development² and the Bologna agreement³, there has been an increased pressure on education in Europe, and an increasing rise in societal expectations, attempting to create measurable predefined learning outcomes. Therefore, education is increasingly used as a means to reach political and economic ends. Saevi (2016) also claims that the idea that increased knowledge is the answer to educational questions, has its roots in the Anglo-American ideals of capitalism, competition, and the belief in increasingly bigger outcomes that, reaped future dividends. Neoliberalism is forcing those of us clinging to pedagogical practice to demand a radical new way of thinking, about how we adults shall meet the young generation, with the complex challenges that exist, instead of focusing on ever greater measurable outcomes of education.

In Norway, the trend unfortunately has politicians and bureaucrats constantly trying to implement new programs and procedures in order to ensure that teachers lead pupils to develop talents – trying to safeguard society from not missing out on human potential. There seems to be a mistrust among the people working in the school system: perhaps students should achieve more – are the teachers really getting the maximum out of pupils’ learning potential? There has been an increase in new learning programs aimed at helping students achieve more, but in all actuality, these programs are distracting, removing students (and teachers) even further from attending to subject matter, preventing teachers from genuine care for that which is right in front of us. The things we should care about, and devote our attention to, are the very things that Arendt (2006) calls *public*.

The secondary directive for teachers and students is to always improve, to get more clever, to learn more in pursuit of never ending means and ends. Sävström (2014) says that the desire for constant improvement in education is simply mad, because it is indefinite – “empty speech,” and “lack of substance” (p. 339). Already Aristotle (1996) warned about this attitude towards doing something for the sake of something else, when we fail to see the value of something in itself. Aristotle (1996) called it “*Ad infinitum*...which obviously results in a process...so that all desire would be futile and vain” (p. 3). The process in a neoliberal system is *ad infinitum*, and money is a good example of something that has little value in of itself. Applied in school, *Ad infinitum* could read as follows: How can I make the most of my talent? How can I become the best version of myself? How can I always get more efficient, and finish my tasks in even less time? Faster– better– more– always caring about results – a relentless striving for better results. How can I fulfil my dreams? The sky is the limit – perhaps I can become whatever I want. Is it all about me? *Ad infinitum* is a contrast to pedagogic freedom, nor is this the ideal to live by for the school. Masschelein states:

School is always about taking care of the new generation. But precisely in order to take care of the new generation, you have to take care of the world. And to take care of the world, is in a way more important than the care for the new generation. Or more precisely, you give the possibility to the new generation by saying “you are not the most important.” (see Sandvik, 2019, p. 143)

² <https://www.oecd.org/>

³ <https://www.hesge.ch/heg/en/studying-heg/reference-documents/bologna-agreement>

This is precisely the responsibility of the older generation; to bring forward what we should care for, what is worth caring about, and what is important. Therefore, what are the right questions that teachers can ask in neoliberal times: how can we constantly achieve more, learn more, produce more in a never-ending pursuit of shallow, instrumental values? My suggestion is that pedagogy can offer an alternative with a focus on what is human and what is moral. Perhaps it is possible to make a break, a rupture, and simply ask, what is good? What is the right thing to do? How can we care about something that is of value to us? What do we value? According to Arendt (2006) these questions are what humans should always be asking, again, and again. Revitalising old and important terms, like freedom, authority, power, and making them vital again, by a sort of fusion with the former and original meaning, allows for us today in neoliberal times, a potent counterpoint. Again, like Masschelein says:

This may be the opposite of what people usually think, that pedagogical is about creating order and creating social order and order in your life. The pedagogical is precisely the moment where the order is disrupted, where something is opened up. The pedagogical has in a way always an element of love. And probably love is something that disrupts, the classical stories of love are those that disrupt the social order. You are not allowed to marry that girl or that boy – love disrupts. It has to do with love for the world. And if you start to talk in terms of moral you always try to reintroduce some order; some rules or some norms. And I think that the pedagogical is anarchic. (see Sandvik, 2019, pp. 144–145)

What is the Difference Between Production, Labour, and Action?

The way the market economy works can be described mathematically using causal explanations. According to Arendt (2006) and Løgstrup (2007), a lot of things in the world follow cause and effect, a means and ends orientation. This is typical for phenomena that behave in a manner that can be planned, measured, calculated, and counted. And it can be important to plan what we are doing in the areas where this is the case which Arendt (2006) calls *production* and *labour*. However, there are places where this kind of calculating does not belong; it is plain wrong, it misses the target, and is even in worst cases inhumane.

Arendt (2006) reveals the area where causality has no role for action, the place between us, where we show ourselves as who we are, our humanity, our character, our most genuine sides—our morality—the good and what pedagogy is really about. To experience pedagogical freedom is the acceptance of being in a shared place where we really do not totally know what we are doing (Arendt 2006; Masschelein, 2013). Løgstrup (1982) says that we have developed societies where things are connected in one way or another, where things affect each other. The problem is that we lack the intelligence to see and to know exactly, and to fully understand how these things work together, how they might influence one another. But the main problem, according to Løgstrup (1982) is that we really lack the morality to keep track with development. Løgstrup (2007) presents the sovereign life expressions which are “given” (p. 18), and “before” us, that we *can* see. The “inward decision” (p. 58) decides whether we will care only for ourselves or if we will be able to turn to the other in order to stand up for him/her – if we are ready to take the responsibility for our neighbour, our brother, our fellow humans – specifically our students. We really have no guarantee that the other will behave in ways that pleases us, and no matter what we do in human affairs, we always have to risk that something completely unforeseen occurs; this is the risk with action (Arendt, 2006). However, this unpredictability does not reduce my responsibility, like Bauman (2009) brilliantly posits:

Being a moral person means that I *am* my brother's keeper. But this also means that I *am* my brother's keeper whether or not my brother sees his own brotherly duties the same way I do; and that I am my brother's [sic] keeper whatever other brothers, real or putative, do or may do. (p. 51)

So, in a pedagogic relationship who is responsible? Bauman (2009) answers, regardless of the asymmetric pedagogical relationship:

I am I who is responsible, he is he to whom I assign the right to make me responsible. It is in this creation of meaning of the Other, and thus also of myself, that my freedom, my ethical freedom, comes to be. (p. 86)

What is my responsibility towards the other? Does my responsibility ever cease to apply? What can I expect from the other – can we do anything other than expecting the good? When shall we turn from “showing the world” to the students, to care for the students in more direct ways; when is it ever right to do that – to let pupils dwell with their own self-occupation?

Conclusion

Although Masschelein primarily argues for directing attention away from subjects, he admits that there are exceptions, and that we sometimes, after all, have to take individual considerations in school: “The teacher can and will take the individual student, his or her questions into consideration” (Masschelein & Simons, 2013, p. 62). Masschelein and Simons (2013) educate the teacher to show judgement about when, and how to “take individual considerations” (p. 62) but that this is not the primary function of the school. This is not the real value the school is presenting which is an expectation and an invitation to direct attention outwards. The teacher must care for something, beyond the self, to be able to use self-determined considerations about where to direct attention. This is exactly the essential judgement required to take responsibility for the Other. Precisely this judgement gives the teacher a chance, to care for something, and to act. But is this acting moral? Because, for the teacher, the students are also part of the world and cannot be measured or presented as a metric in some neoliberal agenda.

I learned from Masschelein that there is a real, tangible, value-laden and important difference between neoliberalism and the pedagogic. Neoliberal principles are aiming at getting personal “profit” from the public school by presenting the egocentric mantra: “what’s in it for me?” By directing focus to the individual, school activities are reduced to be about learning outcomes and personal needs. In contrast is the pedagogical which aims at bringing up young people to care for something of the world, to expel things that do not matter and attend to something of mutual interest, something that is valuable in itself and forget about self, at least for a moment. In this way, the pedagogic I is always striving to be moral in an attempt to focus outwards, away from just ourselves.

References

- Arendt, H. (2006/1961). *Between past and future*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Arendt, H. (2012). *Vitae activa - Det virksomme liv*. Oslo: Pax forlag A/S.
- Arendt, H. (2018). *The human condition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago .

- Aristoteles. (1996). *The Nichomachean ethics*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth classics of world literature.
- Bauman, Z. (2009). *Postmodern ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell publishing.
- Biesta, G. (2011). Disciplines and theory in the academic study of education: a comparative analysis of the Anglo-American and Continental construction of the field. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, 19(2), 175–192.
- Løgstrup, K. E. (1982). *System og symbol*. Viborg: Mortensen.
- Løgstrup, K. E. (2007). *The ethical demand*. Notre Dame & London: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Masschelein, J. (2011a). Experimentum Scholae: The world once more...but not (yet) finished. *Stud Philos Educ*, 30, 529–535.
- Masschelein, J. (2011b). Philosophy of education as an exercise in thought; to not forget oneself when ‘things take their course’. *European Educational Research Journal*, 10(3), 356–363.
- Masschelein, J., & Simons, M. (2013). *In defence of the school - A public issue*. Leuven: Education, Culture & Society.
- Mydske, P. K., Claes, D. H., & Lie, A. (2007). *Nyliberalisme - ideer og politisk virkelighet*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Sandvik, T. (2019). *Hva er frihet og hva er pedagogisk frihet? Utforskning av de to fenomenene med utgangspunkt i et utvalg pedagogisk-filosofisk litteratur, beskrivelser fra egen praksis og intervju med Jan masschelein*. Bergen: NLA Høgskolen.
- Saevi, T. (2016). Phenomenology in education. In M. A. Peters (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory* (p. 7). Bergen: NLA University College, Norway.