

Karl Heinz Auer



Personality Development in the Austrian School System

Im Rahmen des EU-Projektes ARION, das zum Ziel hat, sowohl Verantwortungsträgern im Bildungsbereich als auch politischen Entscheidungsträgern verstärkt hochwertige, gezielte und aktuelle Informationen über bildungspolitische Entwicklungen in den Ländern der Gemeinschaft zur Verfügung zu stellen, stand am 23. Februar 2004 an der Pädagogischen Akademie des Bundes in Tirol, Innsbruck, das Thema „Persönlichkeitsbildung“ im Mittelpunkt. Prof. DDr. Karl Heinz Auer hat sich dabei in seinem Referat über „Persönlichkeitsbildung im österreichischen Schulsystem“ mit grundlegenden Fragen auseinandergesetzt, die sowohl das Verhältnis zwischen den Zielen der österreichischen Schule mit den Grundwerten der Europäischen Union und ihrer künftigen Verfassung betreffen als auch notwendige Schlussfolgerungen für das nationale und internationale Bildungssystem. In kritischer Auseinandersetzung mit gegenwärtigen Projekten im Bildungswesen zeigt er die zentrale Bedeutung der Persönlichkeitsentwicklung im Rahmen der Schule auf, um den unterschiedlichen Anforderungen in Gegenwart und Zukunft zu begegnen. Die „Tiroler Schule“ gibt den Vortrag original wieder:

Ladies and Gentlemen! I am very pleased to be able to talk with you here at the Educational Academy of Innsbruck. The title I have chosen for this presentation is: Personality Development in the Austrian School System. This topic is of utmost importance for all engaged in education either professionally or as parents. Due to the short time allowed by the program schedule for this afternoon I would like to point out only a few aspects which I feel to be of general interest. In the initial part of the presentation, I will offer an anthropological approach to personality and discuss the still much neglected aspect of legal ethics and human dignity. In the final part, I would like to offer some conclusions pertinent to our understanding of personality development which take into account the requirements of the present.

To help you more easily follow my train of thought, I will offer you a presentation via Power-Point-System of the various aspects before going into them in detail.

Personality as a Matter of Science Fiction?

In 1949 Arthur C. Clarke's short story "History Lesson" was first published. The science fiction story tells of the extinction of mankind on Earth and the rediscovery of our planet by people

from Venus. A human tribe had to flee, because in a new ice age the glaciers had come down from the earth's poles, had covered the valleys, and were now climbing the mountains. People still alive stowed their treasures from the past away in a lonely cairn, a mound of stones erected as a memorial. When the glaciers finally came to a standstill, it was too late for mankind. Five thousand years later a crew from Venus landed on the icy Earth and soon the Venusian scientists gathered all the information about the third planet in the solar system. Then many years of research by the creatures of Venus followed during which they found out about the extinct inhabitants of Earth and tried to figure out what they had looked like and how they had lived. But it was not until they found a tiny metal box in a cairn, covered with ice and stones, that knowledge about the history of this planet and its former inhabitants really improved. Thousands of copies of the document within the box were made and distributed. Thousands of scientists learned all they could about this wonderful, remote race by looking at this document again and again. "But all this labour, all this research, would be utterly in vain. ... Millions of times in the ages to come those last few words would flash across the screen, and none could ever guess their meaning: A Walt Disney Production" (Clarke 59). – The Venusians looked at comic figures that only resemble reality. The images were taken for pure reality.

Another "short story" was written about 2400 years earlier by one of the most well known philosophers of ancient Greece: Plato. As a fictional description of a future state, it can be called the first science fiction story of history: The Allegory of the Cave. In this story, some people experience a strange confinement in a cavern, for they are chained so they can only look forward at the wall of the cave. At their backs, a fire burns which they never are able to see. Between their bodies and the fire runs a path with a low wall, along which people carry pictures, puppets, and statues. All the prisoners can see are the shadows on the wall, all they can hear is the echo of the people walking and talking behind them. One of the prisoners is unchained, stands up, and for the first time sees the puppets carried to-and-fro. Somebody urges him to the entrance of the cavern, which is high above their heads. His eyes hurt because of the sudden light to which he is unaccustomed. He does not want to leave the cave but is forced to. After adapting to sunlight, he looks at the real world. During the following months outside the cave, he grasps the laws of nature. If this man were to descend into the cave again and explain the real things to his friends, he would be laughed at. The prisoners would think he became crazy. In addition, if this man should bring his fellows outside too, they would kill him. In this story, the prisoners in the cave look at shadows rather than at real things and they do not hear real voices, only echoes. They take on second-hand opinions and beliefs. In both stories, people think they are looking at the real world but are betrayed. In both stories, the images are taken for pure reality. The philosophical issue of the stories quoted before is that men never do know anything for sure. Perception and knowledge cannot be trusted.

In terms of personality, it is quite the same. There is no absolute standard of personality, which everybody has to achieve. All people start, metaphorically speaking, captivated in the cave. Moreover, many people do not want to leave it just to be stressed by sunlight and truth. Of course,

changes have come with the passing of time. Instead of the shadows of the cave wall, they watch TV- or PC-screens and – in comparison to Clark’s History Lesson – they do not or even do not want to distinguish between reality and a Hollywood production. Sometimes it is difficult, indeed, because several people appear as actors as well as politicians. Personality training has to enable human beings to leave the cave and to make the journey from darkness to light.

What Does Personality Mean?

Having a look at different theories concerning personality we are confronted with many varied approaches by different theorists. The theories are as different as the theorists are. It makes a difference if you choose the psychoanalytic approach of Sigmund Freud, C.G. Jung or Erickson, or if you prefer e.g. the behaviourism of B.F. Skinner or the approach of legal law. These theories cannot be discussed in this short presentation. Therefore, I would simply like to offer you a definition that seems to be adequate for the needs of this afternoon: “It is the deeply fixed, consistent, distinctive and characteristic patterns of our thoughts, feelings and behaviour that define a person's own style of interacting with the physical and social environment. ... Personality is actually the true nature that lies behind these elements. Personality signifies the uniqueness of a person, and the special characteristics that set apart that person from others.” (Thinkquest) The basic question behind all the questions on personality is the question regarding the human being. What does person mean? What does human being mean? Throughout all of history, man has been asking these questions again and again. The imperative of the Temple of Apollo in Delphi ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΑΥΤΟΝ “Know Thyself” focuses on the human being as well as the famous anthropological questions of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who died 200 years ago on February 12: “1. What can I know? 2. What ought I to do? 3. What may I hope? 4. What is the human being? *Metaphysics* is the answer given to the first question, *morals* as the answer to the second question, *religion* as the answer to the third question, and *anthropology* as the answer to the fourth. Fundamentally, however, we could consider all these answers to stem from the field of anthropology, because the first three questions refer to the last one”. To emphasize the importance and dignity of man Kant also stresses the independent use of reason saying: “Sapere aude! Have courage to use your own reason!”

Human Dignity as a Basic Issue

Across all the philosophical and ideological issues it is the law in terms of human rights, which gives us a basic guideline for our focus in the present. The Austrian Common Civil Law Book (ABGB 1811) states in § 16 that every human being is genuinely a person. After the horrible experiences of World War II Germany in 1948 emphasized at the beginning of the Basic Law in Art 1 the following basic issue: “Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority.” Half a century later, in a more basic

meaning than quoted before, human dignity has become an important part of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Art 1: “Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected.” As this Charter is part of the future Constitution of the European Union, Art 1 once more will receive greater emphasis. Human dignity is the fundamental value of the human being, the person, the personality. The framework of those issues in terms of law, human and personality rights is mentioned and described in the preambles, which are very important for understanding the framework and the sources: “Conscious of its spiritual and moral heritage, the Union is founded on the indivisible, universal values on human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity.” At this point, I would like to direct your attention to the basic issue of the Austrian School System. The issues concerning the inviolable human dignity of the human being and the goals of the Austrian Schools correlate remarkably well with one another.

Educational Law in Austria

The so-called “goal-paragraph” of the Austrian educational guidelines uses a very programmatic style and language to describe the goals of Austrian schools. It is the task of the Austrian school to help develop the predisposition of young people in accordance with moral, religious and social values and to endow them with the necessary knowledge and skills for their future profession and life by offering them an education which encourages making ongoing learning an internal priority. Among other things, young people shall be educated to have an independent opinion, social understanding, and to be open minded to different political and ideological issues. They shall be qualified to take part in the economical and cultural life of Austria, Europe and the world and to participate in a free and peace loving attitude in the common responsibilities of humanity.

In accordance with these goals, which bind the entire educational law, to provide pupils with necessary knowledge and skills is only one aspect of the aims of Austria’s educational system. The main goal of the paragraph mentioned before is personality development. I know the “goal-paragraph” sounds a bit like a preamble – not binding the educational system at all. Speaking as a lawyer I would like to point out that the opposite is true. The “goal-paragraph” is intentionally and through its language more familiar to the constitutional level than to a preamble. It is amazing that education in its role of passing on values stands at the top and at the end of the goals mentioned. Normative skills and knowledge are only an embedded part within the bigger framework of personality development. In the words of Immanuel Kant, “The priority of knowledge gives way the primacy of moral.” This is remarkable and of utmost importance to all who are engaged in education, because many are not aware of this fundamental issue!

The Gap Between Theory and Practice

Before entering this aspect of my presentation, I would like you to remember the stories presented at the beginning, Clark's History Lesson and Plato's Allegory of the Cave. The people in both stories were betrayed, and shadows, images and echoes were taken for pure reality. Sometimes I feel that some of the educational activities of the present tend more to play a part in the stories mentioned than in fulfilling their true responsibilities in terms of developing personalities.

Let me give you two examples to explain this. You all know the PISA 2000 paper very well. PISA is a survey of the knowledge and skills of 15-year-olds in the principal industrialised countries. It assumes normative skills and knowledge as the goal of an educational process and thus reduces human beings on a normative level far away from what we are talking about – personality development. The results of the PISA survey have shocked some countries – like Germany e.g. – and pleased others – like Finland and, among others, Austria. Considering the reduced approach and point of view of the survey there is no reason to take the results too seriously, no matter whether you belong to the winners or to the losers of PISA. Despite this, many books and articles were published without realizing the only normative character of the survey. “Class: Future” is another example of educational activities with a reduced normative approach only. The German expression of this Austrian activity has a double meaning: on the one hand “Class: Future” stands for a fantastic future but also for a class named future. I am sure those initiatives are undertaken with the best of intentions in developing the national and international educational systems but they fail to reach their goal because of a lack of consideration of personality development. Educational reforms based on empirical and normative surveys only lead to the situation that they want to avoid – schooling on a reduced normative level only. Education does not mean to know as much as possible. The goal of education is to know the whole. If we reduce education to the normative level of skills only, we would have to admit the truth of Ivan Illich's proposal of “Deschooling Society”. Illich postulates school as the new place of alienation. “Now young people are prealienated by schools that isolate them while they pretend to be both producers and consumers of their own knowledge... School makes alienation preparatory to life, thus depriving education of reality and work of creativity.” (Illich dt. 74) Personality development leads to the opposite of this. Thus, school becomes a place of life preparation, bringing together education and reality as well as work and creativity, taking into account the different levels of a human being as a person (Aristoteles) and thus promoting human and holistic action within the framework of education. Also in reply to the phenomenon of drugs and violence in schools, as we have repeatedly seen in the last few weeks, personality training and development is the only promising way of educational formation.

Conclusions

Students at the Austrian Educational Academies, which educate teachers for primary schools (for ages 6-9), lower secondary schools (for ages 10-14), the pre-vocational year (for age 15) as well as for physically and mentally handicapped children, study humanities in addition to other areas of study involving specific subjects, didactics and school practice. Other teacher training institutions educating teachers for the field of upper secondary schools (for ages 15-18/19) do not offer humanities as an area of study and thus do not offer lectures aimed at helping students acquire professional skills in terms of personality development. Strategies in the change of teacher education must consider the importance of the goals of education and thus of a holistic educational approach which takes into account the young human being both as a person and personality as well as the different skills and knowledge needed in today's world.

To achieve this it is necessary to be aware of the indispensable professionalism of all people concerned with education on the different levels: politicians, heads and professors of the educational institutions, universities and academies as well as teachers. They all must be able to lead the captivated people out of the cave on the journey from darkness to light. Otherwise the question of the New Testament (Luke 6, 39) arises, "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?" The higher the position in the educational system, the better the professional and personality qualifications must be. Teachers in their role as the ones educating young people face to face are permanently forced to reflect their way of working as well as their personal attitudes. There must be no doubt about the fundamental significance of outstanding capabilities of faculty members in teacher training institutions. Considering the changes and reforms of the educational system in the framework of Bologna, questions concerning the students must be discussed too, such as whether to prefer those applicants for educational institutions who have professional experience already, or those with better grades. At present, it often seems that educational institutions prefer quantity to quality. However, it is not possible to push quantity on the level of teacher education and expect quality on the school level at the same time.

Education has to prepare young people for the future. Nobody today knows for sure what the future will be like because it will be created by future generations. As a result, we are always confronted with the problem that today's teachers, having been educated themselves in the past, must educate human beings for a future they do not know, and skills and knowledge do have an expiry date. Human beings with a well-trained personality are able to meet these changes and problems for they know that they themselves are responsible for their further education and their future. The famous poet Jorge Luis Borges philosophically sums up what personality means in terms of changing times: "Time is the substance I am made of. / Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river; / it is a tiger which destroys me, but I am the tiger; / it is a fire which consumes me, but I am the fire."

One of the new songs from Sarah Connor is titled “Music is the Key”. Following this lyrics according to our topic I would like to finish my presentation saying, “Personality development is the key”! Thank you.

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