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THE ORAL INTERACTION BETWEEN STUDENTS AND TEACHERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

University teachers are expected to know their subject matter, but since communication is at the heart of education and learning I am taking it as my starting point in this chapter that it is just as important to know how such knowledge is communicated to students in a trusting relationship and to be able to build a learning environment. This brings me to my next supposition: that the basic human conditions needed for willingness to listen and learn in a relationship with others is the establishment of a trusting relationship, involving such as confidence and a desire to learn. The will to listen and participate in the teacher's knowledge is taken as a beginning for the students' interest in studying and learning more. There is a science of the oral and emotional interaction in the relationship between people, and that is the science of rhetoric, or, when considering the relationship between students and teachers, the science of pedagogical rhetoric (Kindeberg 2011).

However, university teachers in general receive no education in pedagogical rhetoric; rather, confidence in various techniques and methods characterise training in pedagogical practice today, and those have no grounding in research and education in spoken language or its emotional aspects. A possible reason is that the predominant educational theories have not developed a language about and analytical tools for learning in oral interaction between teachers and students. But emotions conveyed in oral expression make teachers appear as more or less credible, the subject as more or less interesting, and the learning environment as more or less secure. Thus emotion constitutes a general and fundamental quality of teaching and learning, and accordingly, teachers' awareness of the role that emotion plays in the oral interaction would provide conditions that can better support students' learning. One way to get a clearer picture of these qualities is to explore the pedagogical meaning of the

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human, moral and political conditions in oral interaction. This chapter deals with the significance of these conditions and how they affect the teacher's possibilities to lead the progress of learning.¹

The contribution to the field of SoTL here is to raise an argument for our need of a better pedagogical understanding of the oral interaction between teachers and students. Yet the oral interaction and its function as support to students learning have received very little attention. The point of departure for the discussion is a pedagogical rhetorical perspective and an introduction to teaching and learning in this perspective will be presented. The intention here is by no means to diminish the significance of other theoretical approaches to learning, but simply to shed light on certain qualities in the oral interaction between participants, and how these influence the dynamics of the situation.

RESEARCH ON ORAL INTERACTION IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is a dominant perspective in research of higher education, starting with Boyer (1990). SoTL can be divided in two broad perspectives. Scholarship of *teaching* can be described as a cognitive perspective concerned with subject matter, how the subject matter can be taught, the teaching planned and the subject matter examined. Scholarship of *teaching and learning* focuses on students' learning, and concerns itself with the ways teaching can be organised to involve the experiences of students (Kreber 2002; Trigwell & Shale 2004). This latter perspective is often connected with socio-cultural theories of learning and promotes methods such as problem-based learning and case studies. SoTL emphasises the teacher's ability to reflect on and document his or her teaching. But the focus is primarily not on oral interaction in the concrete situation. The relationship between teachers and students at the university level has not been extensively studied. Bain's 2004 book, *What the Best College Teachers Do*, is a classic in the field. His 15-year study of nearly 100 college teachers highlights what the best college teachers do. Among the factors listed in the study are instructional design, outcomes, methods and evaluations, but he does not explicitly study the oral interaction in the classroom (Bain 2004). Trigwell, Martin, Benjamin, and Prosser (2000) have interviewed academics at an Australian university to identify how they construe scholarship of teaching, focusing on the teacher's conceptions of their teaching, but not the oral interaction. This lack of attention to the oral interaction between teachers and students is also evident in Carolin Kreber's recent overview of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (Kreber 2007).

1 Part of this chapter is published in Kindeberg T. 2013. The significance of emulation in the oral interaction between teacher and students. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 47(1):99-111.

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The relationship between teachers and students is emphasised in some research on higher education. Amongst the numerous scholars focusing on interaction research, the foremost proponent in the US is perhaps Nel Nodding (2007), and in Europe, Gert Biesta (2004). The relational perspective in education has a long history in philosophy; Buber, Bakhtin, Dewey, Gadamer and Heidegger are some of the most obvious sources. In contemporary discussion the philosopher Adriana Cavarero emphasises that the act of speaking is beyond the specific subject matter and that the voice is essentially relational (Cavarero 2005). The relational perspective in education overlaps with the basic assumptions concerning the relational nature of the human condition in the pedagogical rhetorical perspective, but there is a decisive difference. The pedagogical rhetorical perspective proposes that the teacher creates the necessary relationship with the students through the spoken word.

ORAL INTERACTION IN A PEDAGOGICAL RHETORICAL PERSPECTIVE

From Greco-Roman times through the Renaissance, rhetoric was the heart of all education (Glenn & Carcasson 2009). After the enlightenment, rhetoric and education became separated as scientific disciplines (Nordkvelle 2002). An effect of this separation is that didactics became a subject devoid of the rich resources concerning the effects of oral communication in the rhetorical tradition. Up until now teachers do not have a scientific language concerning the effects of the spoken words on the students' willingness to take part in the teacher's knowledge of the subject matter and thus to participate in the learning movement. The pedagogical rhetoric perspective focuses on the concrete teaching situation, and bases its reasoning on the fact that the spoken word constitutes the main resource of participants in such situations. Here, Aristotle is the leading proponent in the conception of pedagogical rhetoric, and there is a renewed interest in Aristotelian conceptions of pedagogy and rhetoric, for example in the works of Martha Nussbaum (1996, 1998, 2000, 2006). Both pedagogy and rhetoric emanate from society's need for educated citizens, working for the 'good life', and human values. Pedagogy contributes with expertise about issues of education and instruction, and raising young people, in relation to the political and moral aims of a particular society, while rhetoric provides knowledge about the ethical dimensions of oral expression, as well as concerning how content of language affects emotions. The situation of teaching and learning is not just pedagogical, but needs to be considered in its pedagogical rhetorical dimensions, inasmuch as emotions constitute a driving force as support to learning, and these are created in the verbal relationships and oral communication that takes place between students and teachers (Kindeberg 2006).

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Teaching and learning is a collective situation, where students are expected to proceed jointly in their knowledge formation by acknowledging and making use of the diverse experiences each student brings to the situation. At the same time, teaching is society's instrument to influence the citizens of the new generation and educate them as democratic members of society:

And since the whole city has one end, it is manifest that education should be one and the same for all [...]. For they all belong to the state, and are each of them a part of the state, and the care of each part is inseparable from the care of the whole.

(Aristotle, *Politics* transl. 1993: Book VIII 1337a)

This is a notion that has persisted since antiquity, when people came to realise that democracy is not a natural phenomenon, but rather a condition that humans are able to create themselves. Citizens do not become 'good' or 'evil' on their own, but through the instruction they receive. In his work *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes about the importance of instruction:

[F]or it is by building well that they become good builders and by building badly that they became bad builders. If it were not so, there would be no need of anybody to teach them; they would all be born good or bad in their several crafts. The case of the virtues is the same.

(Aristotle, *Ethics* transl. 1967:1103a14-b2)

What is said, as well as the way students and teachers talk with each other, is not just something that concerns the individual teacher, but equally a matter that interests society as a whole, as put forward by Ransome Johnson (2008).

ORAL INTERACTION AS LEARNING MOVEMENT

Oral interaction is understood as a movement, not as a transmission or process (Aristotle, transl. 1967). Individuals who participate in a teaching and learning situation are part of an ongoing activity – something is happening. The oral interaction is an activity that takes place in the present. However, an ongoing interaction is at the same time directed towards the past and the future. The past has a role in the communication, since the speakers use their earlier knowledge and values as a basis for interpreting the issue at hand. At the same time, the oral interaction is directed towards the future through our fundamental desire to understand what we are talking about. We talk with each other because we wish to move forward in a path of reasoning, otherwise it would be meaningless to take part in verbal interaction (Grassi 2001). The movement of learning can therefore also be expressed as our desire to make the unknown known. Ziehe (2003) expresses the same idea, by arguing that it is the movement between a state of recognising and the unknown

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that constitutes the actual point of identification in learning. Biesta (2006) presents a similar line of thought, viewing learning as something unknown which is made known, when he discusses the task of the educator as a responsibility for something which no-one can know in advance.

According to Aristotle we should understand the principle of learning precisely as a movement, because learning – unlike seeing or walking, for instance – does not comprise an actual end. He conceives of learning as a movement in two aspects: as an ongoing direction towards meaningfulness and as a force to get the learning movement forward. As Aristotle says in his works *Metaphysics* (Aristotle, transl. 1998) and *Nicomachian Ethics* (Aristotle, transl. 1967), we cannot say that we have learnt something, at the same time as we are learning; we cannot claim that we have been for a walk, when we are still walking. The teacher plans her lesson, and has an intention with the choice of content, but nevertheless, she cannot know the result from this activity in advance, since none of the students understand or interpret the teacher's expression in the same way. The movement and the possibility of learning come in play when the teacher's and the students' thoughts modify one another. The meaningfulness is materialised in the expressions that create emotions. If there is no meaning, participants will look for new words and expressions in a continuous and mutual movement. The movement of learning is shaped by the meaningful emotions created in the moment. The strength of the movement springs from teachers' and students' ongoing rhetorical activity, searching for meaning. Meaning and action are the same, like in a dance or a conversation. Some of the aspects of this activity, such as longing for meaning, form a whole that is either present or absent, as long as the movement of learning is not completed.

The learning activity occurs when the subject matter is expressed in the oral interaction, when the participants in the teaching and learning relationship use words with various meanings in search for the sense of meaningfulness in the actual and ongoing verbal interaction (Biesta 1998, 2004). Students get an opportunity to see aspects of the subject of which they were previously unaware. Although this can provide a sense of meaning, it does not show whether the student really has 'learnt' anything. It is not until we find ourselves in a future situation that we can tell whether this content has become part of our experience. Learning can therefore not be completed in the same way as building a house or going for a walk. The movement of learning depends on the participants' willingness to participate, and this presupposes a sense that the activity is meaningful and more over a sense of friendship between the participants (Clegg & Rowland 2010). Friendly relations to fellow humans, and the characteristics of friendship itself, have apparently evolved from the relationship of the individual to

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herself, writes Aristotle in his investigation of friendship (Aristotle, transl. 1967). We seek our 'thought mates', and choose those who can awake the sentiment that they are our friends. Aristotle uses the term 'confidence' (in Greek: *pistis*) for the feeling that arises when you trust another person. He believes confidence is the foundation for all meaningful communication. In his *Treatise on Rhetoric*, he divides the *pistis* into *ethos*, the trustworthiness of the speaker, *logos*, the reasonability of the subject, and *pathos*, the emotions experienced in the relationship (Aristotle, transl. 1995). Thus, a fundamental condition for learning is that the student has confidence in the teacher, that the subject matter is expressed in words that make sense and that the student chooses to take part in the interaction. Consider, for example, the following scenario taken from Bingham (2004).

Julie is in college to become a teacher. During a week she had to be absent since her grandmother passed away and she wanted to be near the family and to attend the funeral. On the first day of her return Julie met her English professor. The professor acted in a very sympathetic manner. She showed empathy and asked if there was anything she could do to help Julie. Thereafter Julie met her professor in History. Now Julie met a quite different approach to her and to her situation. The history teacher showed no interest for her feelings or in the reason of her absence. She just concluded after a short conversation that Julie had to come in with the work she had missed and a verification of her absence. The interesting thing for us here is what Julie thought: 'As my history teacher was talking, I became so angry with her for ignoring my feelings, for being so unsympathetic. She lost all credibility in my view. After that, I refused to work hard in that class. She lost her authority as a teacher over me.'

It follows that a fundamental condition for the student's will to learn is the feeling of being good enough, and that her experience is significant. In the teaching situation, the teacher needs to consider both the dependence of individuals on themselves and their dependence on the other(s). An essential quality in the teacher's task is thus being prepared to cope with unexpected points of view, unexpected emotions, and unknown arguments. It is not sufficient for teachers to be able to plan their lessons or lectures. It is equally important to be able to take responsibility for the unexpected effects of the spoken words in a dialogue.

FUNDAMENTAL PEDAGOGICAL CONDITIONS CONCERNING ORAL INTERACTION

In any educational situation, there are certain conditions that include all individuals, regardless of age, cultural background and gender. Such conditions concern the student as a human, moral and political individual. The student cannot be seen as

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only one of these three dimensions, without neglecting something genuinely human with relevance for learning. In the face-to-face encounter, teachers and students are bound to these conditions, which can be expressed as the human, moral and political conditions of education. The pedagogical rhetorical perspective bears upon oral interaction, and the prime interest in the present discussion concerns the emotions that are 'stitched' to language, in the encounter between teacher and students (Kindeberg 2006, 2008). Even if the human, moral and political conditions are separated here, they cannot be abstracted from, without entailing the reduction of the student to a 'non-human' human being.

This is an assumption that is also mentioned in the Swedish official report *För hållbar lärarutbildning* (SOU 2008:109, A sustainable teacher education). In the report, the words "social" and "cultural" are used as expressions for the same comprehensive view of the human learning process (p. 203). I have chosen to focus on the notions of moral (social) and political (cultural) conditions, mainly because they are related to both individual and collective conditions of development, in line with the main objectives for education.

THE HUMAN CONDITION

In the pedagogical rhetorical perspective, the innate dependence of any individual on significant others to evolve and feel well is here contemplated as *the human condition*. We are born into a lifelong dependence on each other, and the will to evolve derives from a fundamental need to be a part of a community. As a consequence of this dependence, the human being is *relational*. We do not own the ability to speak primarily in order to speak to ourselves, but to build relations with others. Here we can use the words of Cavarero (2005) to clarify the relational meaning: "In other words, the act of speaking is relational: What it communicates first and foremost, beyond the specific content that the words communicate, is the acoustic, empirical, material relationality of singular voices" (p. 13). Also, we are not dependent on the spoken words per se, but rather depend on the emotions that oral expression creates, as also Nussbaum (1996) and Rorty (1996) discuss in relation to speaking and emotion in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Aristotle expresses this relationship by saying the intellect can be set in motion by oneself, but the emotions that are needed for the sense of meaning can only be set in motion by others (Aristotle, transl. 1987; Simplicius 1995). Teachers must learn to use this dependence as an asset. Already in the ancient notion of *paidea* (fostering, education, and cultivation, to secure a good, human and democratic society) there is an understanding that every individual is born into a lifelong dependence on others, a dependence that is recognised as

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our ongoing search for acknowledgement and community, as discussed more fully by Poulakis and Depew (2004). What we all have in common is that we are shaped as humans by other humans.

We are simultaneously independent subjects, and dependent on each other, and cannot be seen as simply either-or. We are human by nature, but can only be humanely human in a community. One of the most important human conditions for a teacher to consider is therefore the human characteristic of dependency. Man by nature “cannot be without others” (Aristotle 1993, *Politics*, 1253a): the individual cannot form her identity or character in isolation. To some extent, she is always a result of her history – family, schooling, habits. Thus, we are not capable of self-creation, but are in need of others. The African(a) philosophy of Ubuntu recognises the same idea, often concluded in the famous words of Nelson Mandela: “A person is a person through other persons” or “I am because we are” (see e.g. Oppenheim 2012). It follows that we are by necessity malleable: we cannot help being ‘formed’ and affected by our experiences. The life of each individual is the outcome of meetings, where she fulfils her opportunities to be formed. Throughout life, meetings form habits. Interpretations of what is seen, heard and felt determine our actions. Only by relating to others does a person become human. This is also an assumption that underpins UNESCO’s recommendations concerning higher education, which are made:

Recognizing the decisive role of higher education teaching personnel in the advancement of higher education, and the importance of their contribution to the development of humanity and modern society;

Convinced that higher-education teaching personnel, like all other citizens, are expected to endeavor to enhance the observance in society of the cultural, economic, social, civil and political rights of all peoples;

Aware of the need to reshape higher education to meet social and economic changes and for higher-education teaching personnel to participate in this process.

(UNESCO 1997: Preamble)

In other words, the primary object of education is not only the individual student; the aim is also broadly to promote humanism that results from the citizens’ education.

Active versus passive

We can elucidate the human condition by observing the original meaning of the pair of concepts *actio/passio*. These words were complementary in Aristotle’s terminology, and were used to designate what a person *becomes* (active), and what she *is* (passive). Aristotle believed that people influence their social environment (*actio*), while they are simultaneously influenced by it themselves (*passio*). However, the classical tenor

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of this pair of concepts has more or less vanished from pedagogy, and today the terms are used separately, or as opposites to one another. It is not uncommon that we write in pedagogical texts that the student is assumed to be an active individual, creating his own knowledge. Inversely, other theoretical strands are based on the assumption that the student more or less passively acquires the mediated knowledge that is offered. As Biesta (1998) points out in a convincing reconstruction of Mead's understanding of reflective consciousness: "conveyance is always already embedded in the creative social interaction that education is", in other words, that education is a participatory activity and should thus be seen as creative and transformative (p. 94).

In practice, teachers choose methods according to the stance they take with respect to an assumed polarity, based on *actio/passio*. If the student is viewed as intrinsically 'active', the teacher may choose more independent group tasks, such as case-methodology. If another view of the student is adopted, the teacher may choose to present the subject using more monological measures, for instance, ready-made PowerPoint presentations.

One explanation for the shift in how the notions of active and passive are considered historically, and the resulting loss of Aristotle's view of man as a whole, may be derived from Martin Luther's texts in the 16th century. Luther's understanding of the Bible and Man's relation to God made humans passive in their existence (Braw 2007). By disregarding the tradition of Aristotle's concept, which saw human development in the oscillation between the active and the passive, it appeared logical for Luther to see human beings surrender passively to God. If mankind was to be considered active, it would mean that humans could influence God, a thought Luther and his successors could not accept (Braw 2007:173). Comenius (1657/1989), who obtained such an extraordinary significance for pedagogues with his work *Didactica Magna*, represents the same passive view of mankind.

Although ideological assumptions may vary historically, in practice every teacher knows that we influence, just as much as we are influenced by, those with whom we converse at a given moment. The will to understand is manifested whenever we recognise something, and meanwhile discover new aspects that are not yet part of our understanding. Realising the significance of such new aspects opens our minds to active influence by others. However, this influence can also display the characteristics of an emotional 'affect', which is not primarily connected to the process of acquiring knowledge, but rather relates to the learner's personal disposition.

If the students during a lesson show little interest in the teacher, it can easily undermine the teacher's role as orator, make her insecure, and reduce her own status in front of the students. If, on the contrary, the students show interest and pay attention, the

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teacher's own commitment rises, and she becomes a better orator. The principle of *actio/passio* is of course not only relevant for teachers, it is present in all professions that involve oral expressions in social relations.

THE MORAL CONDITION

The moral condition is a consequence of the human condition and answers the question: How should I act to feel good together with others? Moral in this sense is universal, and deals with people's mutual responsibility for their actions, with words as well as other means of expression (Broadie 1993). How the teacher's task is bound to the moral condition can be better understood through a further examination of how moral and ethics correspond to one another in the idea of *paidea*.

In *paidea*, moral is seen as universal, while ethics are situational. They direct one another, and teachers cannot disregard morals or ethics in any concrete educational situation. In moral lies the shared foundation for humanism. It presents itself in our actions towards one another as human beings. Ethics are bound by context, based on reason. They are knowledge dependent in an intellectual sense, and always bound to (subject) content (Aristotle, transl. 1967). Hence, a fundamental idea behind education is that our different experiences and habits will meet, and by necessity change through the impact of the idea of moral and ethics. This is the teacher's moral and ethical responsibility. Oral expression is a form of ethical activity with words, and should always be understood as ethical action, because those who speak can choose what to say, while at the same time the content in what is being said is valued. Aristotle describes us as political animals. We can be distinguished from animals that merely communicate by the feelings which permeate our verbal interaction, and which allow us to discriminate between 'right' and 'wrong', 'good' or 'bad' in what is being said. As Aristotle puts it:

And why man is a political animal in a greater measure than any bee or any gregarious animal is clear. For nature, as we declare, does nothing without purpose; and man alone of the animals possesses speech. The mere voice, it is true, can indicate pain and pleasure, and therefore is possessed by the other animals as well for their nature has been developed so far as to have sensations of what is painful and pleasant and to indicate those sensations to one another, but speech is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right and the wrong; for it is the special property of man in distinction from the other animals that he alone has perception of good and bad and right and wrong and the other moral qualities, and it is partnership in these things that makes a household and a city-state.

(Aristotle, *Politics* transl. 1993: Book I 1253a)

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Ethics can be seen as variations of our actions in terms of 'good' and 'bad'. An ethical choice of action is thereby bound to its circumstances, and must always be judged from its specific context in order to enable a judgment concerning what is to be considered 'good' or 'bad' (Aristotle, transl. 1967). Furthermore, what is 'good' for one student is not necessarily 'good' for another. Here lies a statement of fundamental significance for what we refer to as the 'art of teaching'. The art is about choosing words, in the right moment, that are motivating and suitable for those present, even if what is said is neither planned nor expected. It is not enough that a teacher is well prepared before a lesson; it is equally important to be prepared for the unknown and unexpected in the encounter with the students (Ramirez 1995).

How the moral condition is expressed can be understood if we consider what might happen when we participate in a group discussion with colleagues. In such a meeting, we carry on the conversation without further reflection. On another occasion, we might notice that no one in the group seems to ascribe any significance to our arguments. No one picks up our remarks and we begin to feel a bit insecure and puzzled. We might make another attempt, but immediately recognise that the feeling of insecurity affects our ability to speak. The voice is altered and we cannot find the words as fittingly as we hoped for. The insecurity now makes us to focus more on how we are regarded as a person, rather than how those who are listening will understand the content of our intended meaning. Another time, we might experience the opposite situation. The words we utter find a hold with the participants, who respond well. We notice an interest for our points of view, and we become increasingly engaged in our colleagues' contributions and the topic of discussion. A good conversational environment is formed, and we discover that we even knew more about the subject than we believed beforehand. The moral condition thus concerns the responsibility for how to act, in order to feel comfortable in each other's company. Environments for discussion and learning will not be better or worse, than the atmosphere the participants are capable to create. If there is a lack of confidence amongst the participants, this is likely due to a lack of understanding, and knowledge about how they might contribute to influence the situation in a positive direction. Every teacher must not only possess this understanding, but also be able to express it, and present it to colleagues and students. If not, there is a risk that the learning environment of both teachers and students will not evolve. In education, we cannot ignore that humans choose to listen to and be affected by those in whom they have confidence (Kristjánsson 2007).

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We create personal chemistry together

One aspect of the moral condition is the emotion we sometimes refer to as 'personal chemistry'; when we don't really feel comfortable with someone we often say that the 'personal chemistry' is not right. Thereby we have also stated that the relation is not working out. Implicitly, we mean that it is an emotional relationship, and that we therefore cannot influence the outcome by ourselves. But in the teacher's profession, just as in many other social-relational professions, it is not possible to dismiss or refuse active participation in human relations on the grounds that the personal chemistry isn't right. This does not necessarily mean that we can stop the occurrence of any negative feelings in educational situations, but as teachers, we must learn how to handle such feelings if they arise, and even make use of them as a resource. In other words, we must learn to recognise feelings that might arise in the encounters with "nagging Lisa" or "indifferent Bob". Moral can in this instance be seen as a 'duty to act' constructively, although the feelings needed to appreciate a particular person may be lacking. Teachers cannot feel equally much for all their students no matter how much they would like to. But teachers can, by being aware of the moral condition, act as if they felt the same for all students. The same awareness naturally goes for the collegial discussions.

THE POLITICAL CONDITION

The political condition derives from the fact that the teachers, as the only profession, have been entrusted by society with the mission and responsibility to influence the citizens' character, in accordance with established laws and regulations. The political conditions bring forth an answer to the question: How are good habits created, so that the students' character becomes a positive force for a humane and democratic society? The path that we are all familiar with since ancient times is based on the realisation that character is formed by upbringing and habits.

According to Aristotle, human character or 'virtue' is created by the foundation of good habits. "The virtues are not planted by nature or in conflict with it, but we are by nature open for them and completed through habit" (Aristotle, transl. 1967). Here, Aristotle expresses the human quality that allows us to be 'formed', in the sense discussed above. We can simply not avoid being formed by others, as long as our eyes are not shut and our ears not closed. The meetings we live through shape the interpretation of what we see, what we hear, what we feel, and how we act. If we as humans are necessarily formed, it also means that we are influenced. The result of influence can be people who function well in society, or people who function less adequately. The ideal has existed since ancient times, of education as an instrument

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of the state, with the purpose of shaping citizens to become wise, knowledgeable and eloquent – the attributes of the good and humane society, as more closely discussed by Sokolon (2006).

The idea of the significance of habit for learning

A person becomes good by doing good! This is an idea already brought forth by Aristotle, and which pedagogues in every generation have refined and passed on. The most widely spread pedagogical formulation is probably Aristotle's "we learn by do" (Aristotle, transl. 1967), which in Dewey's philosophy became "learning by doing". Both formulations refer to the possibilities of education to promote good habits, ultimately aiming to shape a humane and democratic society (Dewey 1966). Like Aristotle, Dewey believes that habits represent continuity in life. Habits are actions reflected by actions in the past, hence earlier experiences affect contemporary experiences (Aristotle, transl. 1967). However, as Dewey emphasises, habits are not to be confused with repetition. Every situation a person meets is new, and she cannot make use of earlier solutions without reflection or adjustments. Habits are active means, and form directions for desire and will of different qualities. They can appear in forms such as helpfulness, unselfishness and solidarity, but also as indolence and egoism. In addition, habits can be observed as proficiencies, such as eloquence and writing. (Dewey 1966). The teacher's function as a role model for the students is one example of the political aspect. If the teacher speaks and acts as though the subject matter is primarily what is in the textbook, she also says something about the teaching profession; the teacher transmits the idea that her professional role is to transmit the subject matter. If the teacher instead chooses to express questions about what she thinks is problematic or unsolved or important, and shows interest in how her students think about the topic, she shows another professional teacher character. In the latter case, the teacher serves as an exemplar of how to relate critically to the subject and how to work in a mutual and deliberative way with students. It is not a small matter for the future of societies what kind of teaching habits the new generation are exposed to. As Quintilian (transl. 1958) writes, the example and the role model are the teacher's foremost means of persuasion.

The political condition holds today the status of a separate subject, in the field called 'moral education' (Nodding 2007). The main problem with presenting morals as a subject in its own right is that it might increase the risk of the moral condition being absent from communication between teachers and students in other disciplines. Teachers' responsibility for the political aspect is then limited to becoming both means and measures, only on certain fixed occasions.

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CONCLUSION

As human beings, we are in a continuous state of change, in which we are formed and reformed by experiences expressed in verbal actions. From the moment we were born, we adapt to the people we meet, in accordance with *the human condition*. The people whom we are dependent on either confirm or block certain activities, and so contribute to how we evaluate and experience each situation, in what we can refer to as *the moral condition*. These experiences are later expressed as our habits. The habits, in turn, constitute the understanding needed to interpret contexts in unfamiliar situations. Verbal habits affect how we think and act, in terms of *the political condition*. When thinking and acting come to the point where they merge, habit has become part of character. To change an individual's conduct or character is consequently linked to the change of (thinking) habits (Dewey 1958).

Here we find further similarities to Aristotle, who says that a habit eventually transforms the will to act, and that gradually becomes a part of the character. As Aristotle puts it:

In one word, such as our actions are, such will our habits become. Actions, therefore, ought to be most diligently attended to; and it is not a matter of small moment how we are trained from our youth; much depend on this, or rather all depends on it.

(Aristotle, transl. 1967:1103a14-b2)

As there are seldom any definite criteria that we could apply to determine whether the verbal action is of the better or the worse kind, teachers must base their considerations on constant inquiries and continual revision. Moral, as well as politics, is in this way firmly rooted in human beings. If we were to adopt a different standpoint, it would be close at hand to assume that our students simply receive the teacher's knowledge, and automatically transform the knowledge into adequate proficiency. With the latter view, teachers have no responsibility for the result of education. Society would thereby stand without teachers responsible for developing the humanistic character of the citizens.

We cannot disregard our mutual dependence on each other: the human condition. We want to be a part of the intellectual communities of others, but it is not indifferent whose community we are considering. We *choose* those whom we trust and have confidence in. However, we are simultaneously bound to the moral condition, since we cannot avoid being affected by the emotions that others, through the spoken words, evoke within us, regardless of whether these emotions express admiration or the contrary. In any concrete learning environment, teachers and students meet, not only in their formal role, but also as fellow human beings. The political condition refers to the teacher's mission from society, and the responsibility for shaping

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students, through their education, to academics with a certain character. Obviously, the teachers themselves must be able to express this character in words and actions.

The predominant educational theories have not developed a language about an analytical tool for learning in oral interaction between teachers and students. There is a need to develop analytical tools concerned both with the relational nature of the human condition and with the potential effects of language in the oral interaction between students and teachers. Above all, we need to consider which aspects matter most as support to the movement of learning as a prerequisite for being scholarly.

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