# Education/Communication: The Two Faces of Communicative Pedagogy

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#### INTRODUCTION

Educators of very different times and places share a common intuition about the educational relationship. They want it to be -- or at least want it to become -- an equal and symmetrical relationship. For this reason they refer to this relationship using such terms as "dialogue" and "communication." There is at least one obvious reason for this intuition, grounded in the fact that the educational relationship is a relationship between human beings. The argument is that the educational relationship cannot and should not be reduced to a merely instrumental, manipulative, or what Habermas<sup>1</sup> calls a strategic relationship, because this would ignore the personhood -- or at least the emerging personhood -- of the child.<sup>2</sup> Kant has expressed the assumption behind this argument very explicitly in his second formulation of the Categorical Imperative, where he argues that, because "man exists as an end in itself," he must in all actions be regarded not merely as a means but always "at the same time as an end."<sup>3</sup>

Basically, educators have taken up the challenge implied in this intuition in two different ways. On the one hand, there are those who endorse the Kantian maxim but at the same time argue that the child is not yet capable of *real* dialogue and *real* communication. For them this capacity is the very sign of adulthood and therefore it is postulated as the intended outcome of education. Education itself is presented as a kind of trajectory which sets out as manipulation and eventually develops into communication. The point of this position -- to which I will refer as *manipulative pedagogy* -- can be made clear by paraphrasing Richard Peters: the child "can and must enter the palace of Communication through the courtyard of Manipulation."<sup>4</sup> Manipulative pedagogy entails the educational paradox -- very eloquently put by Kant in his question "How do I cultivate freedom through coercion?"<sup>5</sup> -- because in seeing education as a process in which the child is in a sense *made* into a person, the personhood of the child is simultaneously affirmed and denied.

The other position is held by educators who do not merely want to *anticipate* the child's communicative and dialogical competency by treating it, for example, as a useful practical fiction. They want to acknowledge this capacity within the very process of education itself. Consequently, they treat education as *real* dialogue or *real* communication. Here we can also speak of a trajectory from manipulation to communication, but that it is not education itself which is depicted as such. What adherents of this position -- which I will refer to as *communicative pedagogy* --argue for, is a replacement of a manipulative understanding of education or a manipulative educational practice by a communicative or dialogical one.

At first sight the manipulative conception appears to make sense as it appears to be supported by what Richard Peters refers to as the "brute facts of child development," which are thought to reveal - and here I paraphrase Peters again -- that at the most formative years of a child's development he is incapable of a communicative or dialogical form of life.<sup>6</sup> Although the communicative conception seems to express an empirical impossibility, this has by no means prevented educators from developing, supporting, promoting and practicing some form of communicative pedagogy. The field is densely populated and contains a wide range of different options, from the dialogical pedagogy of

Martin Buber and "critical-communicative pedagogy" of Klaus Schaller, through positions inspired by Socrates, Hans-Georg Gadamer, John Dewey and Jürgen Habermas, to German "anti-pedagogy" and the work of Paulo Freire.<sup>2</sup>

Now the intriguing question is, Why is communicative pedagogy flourishing? Do adherents of communicative pedagogy think that they can ignore the "brute facts of child development?" If so, is there any reasonable ground for this? Or must we conclude that adherents of communicative pedagogy simply act irrationally?

In this paper I will argue that there is indeed reason for some adherents of communicative pedagogy to neglect the "brute facts of child development." This is done in the context of what I take to be the main aim of this paper, namely, to provide a conceptual clarification of the debate on education and communication. I will first specify the difference between manipulative and communicative pedagogy. Then I will introduce a distinction between two varieties of communicative pedagogy, the *ethical* and the *empirical* variety. After having discussed both varieties, I will show that the crucial distinction is not to be made between manipulative pedagogy on the one hand and communicative pedagogy on the other, but between manipulative pedagogy *and* the ethical variety of communicative pedagogy on the one hand, and the empirical variety on the other. I will then be able to show that only the empirical variety is *not* susceptible to the "brute facts of child development."

# FROM MANIPULATION TO COMMUNICATION

In a paper entitled "From the educational relationship to educational interaction"<sup>§</sup> Friedrich Kron reconstructs three phases in the development of the way in which the educational relationship has been theorized in German educational philosophy. The interesting thing about Kron's reconstruction is not only that it documents a trajectory from a manipulative to a communicative conception of education. He also offers a conceptual framework for specifying the exact difference between manipulative and communicative pedagogy.

Kron starts with Wilhelm Dilthey, who in 1894 declares that "the science of education has to start with a description of the educator in his relation to the educated, as what is first of all needed is a depiction of the educational phenomenon itself."<sup>9</sup> Although Dilthey acknowledges that "education is a function of society," he adds that this function can only be realized in a *personal* relationship between the educator and the educated. In this relationship the intentional activities of the educator are thought to coincide with the "educatibility" ("Bildsamkeit") of the child.<sup>10</sup> Herman Nohl, a student of Dilthey, holds a similar position. For him the foundation of education is situated in the "educative community" ("Bildungsgemeinschaft") between a mature and an immature human being. This relationship exists for the sake of the child, so that he can come "to his own life and form."<sup>11</sup> Where Dilthey -- following Herbart -- talks about educatibility, Nohl refers to the child's "will to be educated" ("Bildungswille").

Kron argues that this "classical" conception of the educational relationship --which was dominant in German pedagogy at least until the sixties -- has two central characteristics. First of all, the educational relationship is characterized by a *one-directional* or *unilateral intentionality*. Education is seen as an intentional activity, but it is only the educator who has intentions, not the educated. The latter is only "educatible." The second characteristic is what Kron refers to as *negative anthropology*. The Dilthey-Nohl conception defines the child in negative terms. The child is *not yet* educated, *not yet* rational, *not yet* competent to communicate, *not yet* really intentional, etc. Taken together, these two characteristics depict the educational relationship as a structurally asymmetrical relationship in which the personhood of the immature child is produced by the intentional activities of the mature adult.

In the second phase -- in which the philosophy of Existentialism plays a central role -- the "idealized" Dilthey-Nohl conception is replaced by a more "realistic" one. The most important

theoretical shift occurs with respect to intentionality: the idea of unilateral intentionality is replaced by the idea of "broken" intentionality. It is acknowledged that the educator can fail in his pedagogical activities because the child is not just "willing material." This means that the child's personhood is no longer thought to be exclusively constituted by the intentional actions of the adult. Educational authority is supplemented by educational impotence, educational love and responsibility by fear and despair. This has repercussions for the anthropological underpinning of education. In a sense, educator and educated are in the same anthropological position. Kron calls it a "radical equality of opportunity" in that the child and the adult are both "thrown into existence."<sup>12</sup> Although the two central characteristics of the first phase are undermined, representatives of the second phase do not come to a theoretical articulation of their position. The reason for this is very well expressed by Otto Bollnow, who argues that the fallibility of education can only be existentially *experienced*; it cannot be put into theory.<sup>13</sup>

This does happen, however, in the third phase, where the leading paradigm is Symbolic Interactionism. From this perspective education is no longer understood as manipulation of the behavior or the behavioral dispositions of the child; education is considered to be a process of social interaction, constituted by the interpretive actions of all participants. This entails a crucial theoretical shift, as the educational relationship is now understood as a *two-directional* or *bilateral intentional* process. This also has anthropological implications, because the child is no longer seen as, by definition, deficient. Bilateral intentionality entails a *positive anthropology*.<sup>14</sup>

Kron's reconstruction offers a conceptual framework for specifying what is at stake in the shift from a manipulative to a communicative conception of education. In terms of this framework it is a shift from unilateral to bilateral intentionality and, correspondingly, from an negative to a positive anthropology. While in the first position, the personhood of the child is thought to be dependent upon the intentional activities of the educator, the second position envisages education as a process constituted by the intentionality of both the educator and the educandee.

# THE ETHICAL VARIETY OF COMMUNICATIVE PEDAGOGY

Although Kron gives a clear idea of what is at stake in a communicative conception of education, one crucial distinction *within* the field of communicative pedagogy remains invisible. This is the distinction between what I propose to call the *ethical* and the *empirical* variety of communicative pedagogy.

A fine example of the ethical variety has recently been given by Nicholas Burbules in his book *Dialogue in Teaching*. Burbules characterizes his book as a description and a defense of a particular educational ideal, namely, dialogue.<sup>15</sup> Dialogue is described as "a particular kind of pedagogical communicative relation: a conversational interaction directed intentionally towards teaching and learning,"<sup>16</sup> which implies that not every interaction between human beings counts as dialogue. Burbules stresses that dialogue is "non-teleological" in that it has no pre-determined outcome.<sup>17</sup> Also, dialogue "tends toward a decentered and non authoritarian view of learning,"<sup>18</sup> as it is not aimed at changing other people but at effecting a change in and by the participants themselves.<sup>19</sup> The communicative foundations of dialogue are found in the fact that language, reason, morality and our social organization -- and here Burbules refers to Bakhtin, Vygotsky, Habermas and Dewey -- are thought to be thoroughly dialogical and relational in character.<sup>20</sup>

Although Burbules argues for a dialogical type of education, he is well aware that there is no guarantee that the practice of education will ever conform to this educational ideal. Dialogue might therefore best be understood as a kind of "critical reference point."<sup>21</sup> Crucial for Burbules's position is his claim that it is not an unrealistic or utopian reference point.

practices in which we are actually engaged. In this, they function as reminders of standards that are necessarily implied by what we do and by what we say we want. $\frac{22}{2}$ 

Elsewhere in his book, Burbules stretches this argument a bit further when he writes that according to Habermas the

essential feature of communication towards understanding is that it entails an implicit commitment to certain standards...that can be invoked by either partner in conversation.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout his book Burbules stresses that dialogue depends upon "the commitment that joins interlocutors in an ongoing communicative relation."<sup>24</sup> Therefore, successful dialogue

involves a willing partnership and cooperation in the fact of likely disagreements, confusions, failures and misunderstandings. Persisting in this process requires a relation of mutual respect, trust, and concern -- and part of the dialogical interchange often must relate to the establishment and maintenance of these bonds.  $\frac{25}{2}$ 

This shows that the dialogical relation is not exhausted by a cognitive interest; the "affective qualities of concern and commitment that draw us into dialogue" and "the capacity of dialogue to involve us and carry us beyond our intentions" are all aspects of the dialogical relation.<sup>26</sup>

As Burbules's point is that dialogue depends upon "a commitment to the process of communicative interchange itself,"<sup>27</sup> it does not come as a surprise that the development and fostering of such a commitment is taken as a crucial step towards a dialogical educational practice. Here Burbules introduces the notion of "communicative virtues," which include such qualities as "tolerance, patience, an openness to give and receive criticism, the inclination to admit that one might be mistaken, the desire to reinterpret or translate one's own concerns...the self-imposition of restraint in order that others may have a turn to speak, and...the willingness to listen thoughtfully and attentively."<sup>28</sup>

Burbules sees the relationship between the communicative virtues and dialogue as a reciprocal one. Whether dialogue will happen, depends upon the communicative virtues of the interacting partners;<sup>29</sup> but it is precisely by means of dialogue that these virtues are developed. On the one hand, this means that the communicative virtues constitute "significant educational aims in their own right."<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, it implies that education itself is a process of "initiation" into dialogical relationships.<sup>31</sup> This is thought of as a "bootstrapped process," because for Burbules it makes no sense to wait for ideal conditions to happen. "We improve by imitating, practicing, and experimenting in the midst of real-time activities."<sup>32</sup>

There can be no doubt that Burbules's position is a specimen of communicative pedagogy. Dialogue is not something to happen *after* the child has been educated; education *itself* should be dialogical. Further, Burbules defines dialogue in terms of a bilateral intentionality, which suggests that it is backed by a positive anthropology. My reason for calling Burbules's position a specimen of the *ethical* variety of communicative pedagogy is twofold. First it should be noted -- and this is by no means meant as a disqualification of Burbules's position -- that he only gives a "description and defense" of a particular educational ideal. Burbules's point is that we *ought to* educate in a dialogical way. Although, as I will argue below, his justification for this "ought" is not without importance, this has no effect upon the status of his enterprise. Basically, it is an evocation. This evocation -- and this is my second reason -- is addressed to the partners in interaction. Burbules makes dialogue totally dependent upon their *commitment*. Dialogue will only happen when at least two human subjects have committed themselves to it. This *ethical* commitment comes first; dialogue is derivative. Taken together, Burbules specifies what we *ought to* do and what *we* ought to do.

#### THE EMPIRICAL VARIETY OF COMMUNICATIVE PEDAGOGY

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While the ethical variety argues that education *should be* dialogical or communicative, the basic claim of the empirical variety is that education *is* communication. The difference is not a merely verbal one. What lies behind these claims, are two different anthropological presuppositions, or, to be more precise, two different conceptions about the relationship between subjectivity and intersubjectivity. While the ethical variety understands intersubjectivity as grounded in subjectivity, the empirical variety understands subjectivity as grounded in intersubjectivity.<sup>33</sup>

The ethical variety of communicative pedagogy rests upon an intentional conception of human (inter)action which has its theoretical roots in what Habermas refers to as the tradition of the philosophy of consciousness.<sup>34</sup> This tradition takes the individual, conscious subject as the unproblematic unit of analysis and explains social interaction -- including educational interaction -- as an achievement of the interacting partners. In this tradition, the individual subject is treated as an independent variable. In the empirical variety precisely this conception of human subjectivity is contested. From the empirical point of view, subjectivity is thought to be in need of an explanation. And the intersubjective, communicative "praxis" is proposed as the independent variable that can do so.

Within philosophy the "intersubjective turn" has, amongst others, been taken by John Dewey, George Herbert Mead and, more recently, by Jürgen Habermas.<sup>35</sup> Habermas has introduced the notion of "communicative action" to refer to the communicative praxis which precedes subjectivity. I have argued elsewhere that the same concept can also be used to characterize the pragmatic position.<sup>36</sup> What should be kept in mind here is that the expression "communication" is not meant to refer to the interaction between subjects; rather, it is meant to refer to the "matrix" that precedes subjectivity. Although this matrix can be understood ontologically, that is, as the source from which subjectivity emerges, the "paradigm of intersubjectivity" at least entails a methodological rule, namely, that intersubjectivity is the explanatory entity.

The claim that education *is* communication should be understood against this background. This means that it is meant as an alternative for those views of education based upon the -- in the eyes of the empirical variety problematical --presuppositions of the philosophy of consciousness. I deliberately speak in the plural, that is, about views, as this not only holds for the ethical variety of communicative pedagogy but also for manipulative pedagogy. Both positions presuppose the existence of intentional subjects. The only difference is that manipulative pedagogy denies that the child already has intentions of its own, while the ethical variety of communicative pedagogy holds that the child should be treated as having real intentions. Although Kron is right in arguing that the difference between the two positions can be specified in terms of unilateral versus bilateral intentional subjects -- is presupposed.<sup>37</sup> From this point of view, the split is *not* between manipulative pedagogy and the ethical variety of communicative pedagogy on the one hand, and the empirical variety on the other.

The key question of course is what the intersubjective turn exactly implies for our understanding of education. The definitive answer to this question has not yet been given; so far there have only been very few attempts to make this connection.<sup>38</sup> I will therefore confine myself to two issues that can shed some light upon the status of the empirical variety of communicative pedagogy.

The first issue concerns the claim of adherents of manipulative pedagogy that education-asmanipulation is the means by which the "Palace of Communication" can and must be reached. What is suggested here is that the community between educator and educandee can and must be brought about by the intentional actions of the educator. However, for the actions of the educator to have any effect upon the child, some form of community must be presupposed. The claim of the empirical variety of communicative pedagogy is that precisely this community is the basis for any interaction at all. In this sense community -- or communication -- is not only thought to precede all education, but is in fact a constitutive precondition, or what might be called a transcendental  $\frac{39}{29}$  precondition, of education.

The suggestion that education has a non-intentional communicative basis, can also be clarified by means of the difference between the intention and the meaning of an act.<sup>40</sup> In the manipulative account, it is presumed that the intentions behind the actions of the educator coincide with their meaning. From the perspective of the empirical variety, it is argued that there is no reason whatsoever to assume such a coincidence between intention and meaning. The meaning of an act is brought about in the communicative praxis in which this act plays a role. It is therefore (by definition) intersubjective. Educational actions are not excluded from this, and the adherents of Kron's second phase were well aware of this fact. But neither they, nor the adherents of Symbolic Interactionism were able to articulate this intuition in a non-intentionalistic way. Empirical communicative pedagogy, however, is able to do away with this "intentionalistic bias," by arguing that intersubjective meaning overrides subjective intention.

This brings me to my second point, namely, whether the empirical variety is threatened by the "brute facts of child development" or not. To begin with, it must be acknowledged that both manipulative pedagogy and the ethical variety of communicative pedagogy are threatened by these facts. Manipulative pedagogy simply acknowledges this and consequently sees education as a structurally asymmetrical -- and paradoxical -- enterprise. In the ethical variety of communicative pedagogy, the problem is circumvented. This is most clearly shown in Kron's discussion of Symbolic Interactionism, where it is argued that education has a lower limit in what is known as the "phase of stubbornness." This stubbornness is thought to be the first sign of the intentionality of the child; from there (bilaterally intentional) education can supposedly take off.<sup>41</sup> To my mind, Burbules is not that clear about this issue. From the fact that dialogue is characterized as a bilaterally intentional activity, it might be argued that he is also forced to acknowledge a lower limit in education. But as he argues that the dialogical development of communicative virtues is a "bootstrapped process," it might also be concluded that Burbules holds that dialogue can start from birth onwards (although the question then would be, whether this counts as "real" dialogue, or simulated dialogue dependent upon the intentionality of the adult).

My reason for arguing that the empirical variety is *not* threatened by the "brute facts of child development" has to do with what is thought to be revealed by these facts, namely, that the child is not yet a full-blown, that is, an intentional subject. The point of the empirical variety is that subjectivity is *not* a constitutive precondition of intersubjectivity and communication. Therefore, it is not affected by the non-intentionality of the child. This is only a problem for those positions which "need" a subject before they can talk about intersubjectivity and communication. Of course, this does not entail a denial of the "brute facts of child development" (their role in the empirical variety has to be discussed elsewhere). What should not be forgotten, however, is that there are no "brute facts" as such. Therefore, it might well be that most of the facts revealed by developmental psychology are, in a sense, produced by, or at least dependent upon, the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness.

# CONCLUSIONS

In this paper I have introduced a distinction between two varieties of communicative pedagogy. Although at first sight it seemed as if communicative pedagogy argues for a symmetrical, bilaterally intentional conception of education while manipulative pedagogy sees education as an asymmetrical, unilaterally intentional endeavor, I have shown that the dividing line can also be drawn differently, namely, between manipulative pedagogy and the ethical variety on the one hand, and the empirical variety on the other.

The central claim of the empirical variety is that education *is* communication. This should be understood in the sense that communication is a constitutive precondition of all human interaction,

including education. As from this perspective communication is not considered to be constituted by the intentionality of its participants, it is not threatened by "brute facts of child development" that reveal that the child has no intentions yet.

Although I have argued that the position of Burbules is a specimen of the ethical variety of communicative pedagogy, Burbules himself seems to suggest that the ethical variety is implied by the empirical variety. This can be concluded from the fact that he founds his position upon the idea that language, reason, morality, and our social organization are thoroughly dialogical in character. He also argues that communicative norms such as dialogue "exemplify implicit values that we actually do hold" and are therefore "necessarily implied by what we do."<sup>42</sup> I do not think that this necessity exists. Of course, a strong argument can -- and I presume should -- be made in favor of dialogical educational practices. But the idea that man is a dialogue is possible. But the same can be said about the most terrible examples of indoctrination. Although it helps to know that what we want is possible, what is possible is never automatically the case. I therefore conclude that the relationship between the empirical and the ethical variety is completely contingent.

1. Jürgen Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, vol. 1 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 285.

2. Compare Jürgen Oelkers, "Pädagogische Anmerkungen zur Habermas' Theorie kommunikativen Handelns [Pedagogical Comments on Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action]," *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik* 30 (1983): 271-80.

3. Immanuel Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

4. Richard Peters, "Reason and Habit: The Paradox of Moral Education," in *Moral Education in a Changing Society*, ed. W.R. Niblett (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1963), 55.

5. Immanuel Kant, Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichtsphilosophie, Politik und Pädagogik [Essays on Anthropology, Philosophy of History, Politics and Education]. Immanuel Kant Werke, Band VI. Hrsg. Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1964), 711.

6. Peters, "Reason and Habit," 54.

7. See, e.g., Martin Buber, *Reden über Erziehung [Lectures on Education]* (Heidelberg: Schneider, 1962); Klaus Schaller, *Pädagogik der Kommunikation [Pedagogy of Communication]* (Sankt Augustin: Richarz, 1987); Nicholas Burbules, *Dialogue in Teaching* (New York/London: Teachers College Press, 1993); Gert Biesta, "Education as Practical Intersubjectivity; Towards a Critical-Pragmatic Understanding of Education," *Educational Theory* 44 (1994): 299-317; Jan Masschelein, *Kommunikatives Handeln und pädagogisches Handeln [Communicative Action and Education Action]* (Weinheim: Deutscher Studien Verlag, 1991); Robert Young, *A Critical Theory of Education* (New York/London: Teachers College Press, 1990); Eckehardt von Braunmühl, *Antipädagogik. Studien zur Abschaffung der Erziehung [Anti-pedagogy: Studies for the Abolition of Education]* (Weinheim: Beltz, 1980); Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970).

8. Friedrich Kron, "Vom pädagogischen Bezug zur pädagogischen Interaktion [From the Educational Relationship to Educational Interaction]," *Pädagogische Rundschau* 40 (1986): 545-58.

9. Ibid., 546, (All translations from the German are mine).

10. Ibid., 546.

- 11. Ibid., 547.
- 12. Ibid., 551.
- 13. Ibid., 550.
- 14. Ibid., 556.
- 15. Burbules, Dialogue in Teaching, 17.

16. Ibid., x.

17. Ibid., 17.

18. Ibid., 9.

19. Ibid., 10.

20. Ibid., 10-15.

21. Ibid., 146.

22. Ibid., 164-65.

23. Ibid., 74 (emphasis added).

24. Ibid., 19.

25. Ibid., 19-20.

26. Ibid., 21.

27. Ibid., 8.

28. Ibid., 42.

29. This does not imply a "subjectivistic" conception of dialogue. Burbules explicitly states that "the failure to exercise virtues in certain contexts cannot automatically be attributed to personal shortcomings.....(In fact) the burden of criticism ought to be on the context, more than on the flawed character it has produced." Ibid., 43.

30. Ibid., 46.

31. Ibid., 58.

32. Ibid., 49.

33. See Biesta, "Education as Practical Intersubjectivity," 301; compare Masschelein, *Communicative Action and Educational Action*, 207.

34. See Jürgen Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne [The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity]* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1988).

**35**. See Biesta, "Education as Practical Intersubjectivity." The "intersubjective turn" can also be traced in the works of Donald Davidson; see the very illuminating interview with Davidson in Giovanna Borradori, *The American Philosopher* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 40-54.

36. Gert Biesta, "Pragmatism as a Pedagogy of Communicative Action," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 13 (1994/95): 273-90.

37. This means that the empirical variety is not included in Kron's reconstruction.

38. The most elaborate account, based upon Habermas, is Masschelein. With respect to pragmatism, see my "Education as Practical Intersubjectivity" and "Pragmatism as a Pedagogy of Communicative Action."

39. This is suggested by Davidson; see Borradori, 42.

40. See also Masschelein, Communicative Action and Educational Action, 225.

41. Kron, "From the Educational Relationship to Educational Interaction," 556.

42. Burbules, Dialogue in Teaching, 146.