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Four Dimensions in Pedagogical Discussion

Friedrich W. Kron[*]

Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz
fkron@t-online.de

In order to structure pedagogical topics for discussion purposes in a meaningful way, applying a conceptual scheme to organize these may be of great help. Such a scheme is referred to as a "pragmatically grid" and is also suggested in respective publications (Geulen/Hurrelmann 1998, 51-67; Ulich 1976, 18; Tillmann 1993, 16ff; Kron 2001, 38ff u. 81; Kron 2004, 50-53). This grid has three or four dimensions, by which pedagogical topics can be viewed and discussed. I will be speaking of four dimensions. These are as follows:
1. The societal,
2. The institutional,
3. The interactional and
4. The individual dimension.

Applied together, these four dimensions help to reveal implicit epistemological interests, to recognize different levels of argumentation and to put into perspective oppositional positions of discussing parties as well as help to become aware of ones own position.

In the following I will unfold the most important characteristics of these four dimensions, which may be noticed during discussions.

1. The *societal dimension* is strongly determined by political decisions, which must be seen as the fundamental conditions for the other dimensions. Thus school and lessons are legitimized through respective laws, which have been passed by parliament with political means and are linked with educational politics.

    Even the fact that teachers are granted school time for „independent activities“ (depending upon grade) is legitimized by law.

    In addition, the definition of school system and the various school types as well as the organization as structure of school, the order for promotions, the examinations, the decrees and enactments, the curriculum, the approval of school books by the governmental department, and last but not least the education of teachers all are based on respective laws.

    Hence, if pedagogical arguments play a role in political discussions, they serve the ultimate objective of making laws, which establish the societal conditions for the pedagogical enterprise. Realizing the implications of this differentiated coherence by its own virtue yields a specific lucidity by which we can examine the next dimension.

2. The *institutional dimension* pertains to the regular cultural and social interactions in school education and teaching. It is determined by rules and regulations that are based on the

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[*] Friedrich W. Kron is Emeritus Professor at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz

political decisions that constitute the first dimension. This is where the legitimated institutions and organizational constitutions are at stake, which serves an organized enculturation and socialization of its members: i.e. Kindergarten, church, military and universities, the mass media and – within the realm of my statement – the organization of school and of instruction. Here, rules and regulations, that govern the orders of schools, promotions, examinations, decrees and enactments, the curriculum and school books, play an important role – however in the light of the viewpoints and objectives of those who are teaching within the concrete situation. These are the teachers in their own school, where they have to put all these rules and regulations in concrete forms. Thus, the councils of every school will have to determine how to organize the implementation of the „independent activities" within the class schedule, such that both serve a pedagogically well-reasoned end and as well benefits the school as a whole.

This is also the dimension, where we will find cultural and social patterns for behavior and modes of interaction to be in effect, which determine the teacher-pupil relationship. The more formal patterns are usually prescriptive in school orders or house rules and teachers and instructors are declared to be the representatives and substitutes of the lawfully legitimized rules. In accordance, they are allocated the right to implement and enforce these rules of conduct and behavior.

The informal patterns, on the other hand, can be recognized by the usual values and standards that guide participants in managing their conflicts, conversations and discussions amongst one another.

3. The *interactional dimension* addresses the concrete cooperation in school life. Primarily it refers to the shaping of interaction and communication processes. This dimension always includes two aspects: a subject matter and a socially related aspect. The subject matter related aspect is determined by the specific school subjects, such as mathematics or mother tongue. But also social matters can become subject matter, i.e. in the case of discussing codes of conduct or standards for behavior and interaction. This will for instance be realized when trying to resolve a conflict. The socially related dimension is characterized by the fashion in which participants regulate their cooperation – whether they resume to formal rules or work out and apply informal rules to communicate with one another. Here interactional and operational processes merge into communicational processes, where verbally a mutual understanding about a subject matter related or socially related issue is achieved. The teacher´s council can thus determine, whether an English teacher at their school may dispose over four weeks for "independent activities" to realize an internet project with his/her class or not.

4. Finally, the *individual dimension* is characterized by the learning processes that are produced by the pupils and occasionally by the teachers themselves.

Regardless of what learning theory one assumes to explain these intra-personal processes (Kron/Sofos 2003, 85-113), pedagogical discussion will have to observe two basic facts: firstly, all learning processes are stimulated by interaction between the learner and his/her environment and secondly, learning processes do not primarily serve as accumulation, but rather as cultivation of knowledge. In this respect learning processes stimulate development of personality. They change or stabilize motivations, attitudes, expectations; they promote the organization of one's own knowledge and improve competencies and skills; they enable blue-prints (drafts) for action plans and strengthen self-confidence to

try out something new. In this respect, school lessons may in fact nurture the development of pupils' personalities, if they are organized in an attractive manner (e.g. in form of an internet project) and if the activity is legitimized respectively. Ultimately here, the interdependency of all four dimensions becomes evident, but at the same time, allows each individual perspective to fulfill its own specific epistemological function.

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