

THE PEDAGOGY OF COPING BASED ON ADULT EXPERIENCE

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We teach, we educate. Our first-hand experience gives us knowledge only of fragments. In so far as our experience is real, it still justifies only limited interventions. We employ strategies, since we have an opinion about everything. The philosophies concerning our world are never in such a ready, cut-and-dried state that our knowledge of the world cannot be improved. These strategies extend as far to the horizon as reason can reach. We are not scholars in the eyes of our students. We still have to carry on, even if we ourselves doubt the meaningfulness of events, or think otherwise than others. An adult looks back on his childhood; and he takes this as a benchmark for imagining the situations, requirements and intentions of others. As adults, we can bring experience to our relationship with our students. Coping is not just for its own sake; we can benefit from it in many ways. Teaching the ability to cope, the acquisition of necessary attitudes by students, is an opportunity that presents itself in adulthood; since not only knowledge but life experience make for effective professional practice. Biological, psychological and sociological processes run in parallel with individual and communal attitudes and behaviour, and so abet further personal development. Research into attitudes and behaviour suggests that personal adaptation and self-control are the two key factors which render possible accommodation to, or control of, another person, when two individuals, an individual and a community, or two communities come into contact with each other.

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Experience as a concept

As a concept, experience means (Brugger, 1976): sensory experience, to notice, to discover, to explore, to seek out. Gaining experience means gaining knowledge from that experience. Aristotle interprets experience as the assessment of observation: that is, *empeiria*. Kant bases validity of judgement on the empirical. Experience means the perception or apprehension of real abilities, which may range from the obvious state of affairs to the "partly or completely unknown which can be experienced if we are open to it". External experience applies to things, sensory characteristics; internal experience concerns our own mental acts and state. Pure sensory experience is called empirical experience, which gives way to abstraction and the cognition of essences. Intellectual experience includes the

experience of inner thinking, the judgement or conclusion arrived at after intellectual activity, and the assessment of our relationship with others. All this is partly the consequence of previous experience and assessments, and the basis for whatever evolution there might be of our attitudes and intellectual development.

Reality ranges from what is perceptible externally and what is experienced subjectively to what is unrecognizable through our sense organs; this is the object of experience.

The characteristics of experience

Personal Experience. Is it sufficient to interpret experience for pedagogical purposes, from a philosophical angle? Matters of principle are always more colourful when applied personally; their applicability depends upon how they fit the situation. Human beings are individuals, with unexchangeable characteristics in their humanness. It is no coincidence that the success and correction of personality development has to be *personalised* as well.

Humankind's journey can be compared to nature's journey. During the time that passes between birth and death everybody faces the need to cope, and, at the same time, we evolve as mature individuals. In spite of all loss and failure, a person's life can be progressive, productive and fully valuable. Beyond this general statement, we must acknowledge the fact that each individual has his *own life*, which he interprets, understands, according to his own judgement, based on his own experience; he grows in awareness of his responsibilities and he discharges them. Being social animals, we are not isolated in our own life. Our experience is of thinking together with others; as a result of our perceptions, we make sense of connections, we systematize them, and aim to make use of them at an *individual and community level*.

Professional Experience. The processing of experience does not feature in a person's life as an answer to philosophical questions. Erudition and knowledge are different. Rather, there are several interpretations of the way in which philosophy might affect our lives. It is a fact that we stand in constant need of interpreting other people's experience in order to face the completely unknown. We cannot relive all that has shaped humankind, its universal experience and traditions. It is certain that we cannot refuse *a priori* the establishment of philosophical study, judging it to be some kind of over-sophisticated, useless thing, distant from real life. Pedagogical praxis considers experience to be of great importance. On the one hand, it is education philosophy (Keller & Novak, 1993), which established the idea that *gaining experience* is a starting point *in education* as well. Almost all schools of pedagogy agree that what we teach must be connected to its empirical base. Presenting, living through, referring to something means advancing on the route of knowledge in an empirical, more precise, and more complete way. Mere recitation, recalling and text-based learning is not sufficient for obtaining complete knowledge.

Post-Occurrence Experience. According to Brezinka (1963), life always provides us with ex-post-facto, that is post-occurrence experience. For this reason the beforehand, "preparation for life" which would be carried out during the school years, is not possible. Instead of this everything has to be processed according to the sequence of life's events, in its place, and one can operate as an experienced person by drawing a lesson from this sequence. Brezinka can be regarded as one of the founders of scientific theory in empirical pedagogy (Olechowski, 2004).

Experience Derived from Exercising Influence. As there are always unsolved problems that we should like to resolve, it is especially worthwhile to examine the pedagogical content that problem-solving processes might carry with them. We insert the word transaction on purpose instead of interaction. The transactions between educator and educated result in changes in both of them, as they influence each other. There is therefore that adult experience that arises from observing the problem-solving ambitions of younger people. A pupil's individual way of coping, his attitudes, have an effect on the adult's coping strategies. Undertaking a task (e.g. processing empirical content), applying the appropriate principles (e.g. aiming at a better understanding of reality), being aware of the aim of the activity (e. g. description and interpretation of it), and the selection of an appropriate method (e.g. scientific, artistic) are important elements of coping. In their joint investigation, both educator and educated can obtain knowledge that is useful beyond the examination of the given occurrence. There are experiences therefore, which can be obtained in the course of the educational process. Consequently, *each occupation, each profession* provides the possibility of *obtaining its own experience*. Competences assigned to a profession offer one the chance to obtain professional experience.

Experience Realised During Action. The experience of the student and that of the teacher can be simultaneous. Younger and older people experience events that have an effect on both of them. Educators and pupils have to 'learn each other'. In the education space there are not only objects but individuals. Discovering facts is not always possible in a second. It might not be possible inasmuch as they are realised in limited time-frames that are not complete at the outset of gaining experience, but they are discovered gradually as time goes on. This activity of discovery can be called experience in action. Among Hungarian educational programmes, the work of *Zsolnai J.* (e. g. Kocsis & Zsolnai, 1997) is outstanding. His pedagogical life work is connected to skills development and the transmission of cultural values. His developing, innovative work is connected to *action research* (Csík, 1994). Processed experience is the basis for the renewal and further development of his pedagogy at each stage. It is no coincidence that these principles led to the development of the Hungarian system of student groups in basic science. Science pedagogy provides the possibility for the youngest to take part in the tackling of problems of contemporary world significance according to their age and capabilities. Action research supplies a framework for the Movement of Research Students. Csik's work offers us a new perspective on the teaching experience. It concerns *the new experience gained* by the teacher/student, educator/educated *while working together*. Action research fosters pedagogical initiatives, creativity, and innovation on a research path that keeps hope alive, and that is a pioneer method for solving common problems. In addition, it constructs the possibility of a particular route, because the participants in action research will come to an awareness of the processes later. Education involving action research provides a continuous possibility of renewal, and the human art of coping with problems in practice. We can state that, generally, experience refers to empirical reality during transactions between the teacher and the student.

Experience Gained through Communication. Scár bath (1970 and 1984) sees in pedagogy a good grounding for the sort of practical work resulting from research, theory and meaningful discussion. This practical approach makes use of the consequences of events as useful background.

Diachronic Experience. Problems ranging across periods of time, historical eras, are the basis for the so-called *diachronic* approach (Kéri, 2001). This theory is particularly at home in the history of pedagogy. Good task definition, good questioning techniques, finding solutions to real problems are activities that span centuries. Obtaining the appropriate experience requires several generations.

Experience Formed among Cogitative Individuals. It is already possible to gain experience, to discuss, to take a perspective in school. The ambition to gain experience can be very productive, if an educator with professional knowledge at his disposal stands by the student. A trained educator, often only a few years older than the student, is capable of using his own experience and transmitting it. One's own experience laid before others is always of less significance than the reality we live through. Scholars, outstanding educators, practising professionals form a community. To illustrate this let us cite a few names from those concerned with thinking about gaining experience: J. Dewey, J. Locke, J-J. Rousseau, M. Montessori, B. F. Skinner, L. S. Vigotszky, A. F. Whitehead, L. Wittgenstein.

Experiencing Meta Occurrences. *Meta-emotions* correspond to second-hand feelings, emotions, which refer to first-hand emotional experience. Meta-emotions can be short and long term (Eisenberg, 1996).

Transcendental Experience. The possibility of cognition, which is true to reality, the cognition of truth, has certain conditions attached to it. One obtains such experience, a cognitive act is performed, as it were, when one reflects on the experience intentionally. This in fact intellectual self-awareness, the requirement for the possibility of discovering truth. Transcendental experience is (Rahner, 1983) "the knowledge of the cognitive subject typical of discipline, which is non-thematic and is included in all mental acts; which is both necessary and unavoidable; and is open to the unrestricted horizons of all possible realities." The combination of already acquired knowledge and the knowledge to be experienced is transcendental experience, and its content is obtained through openness to what is limited and what is without limits.

Integrated Experience. Regarding *Context and interaction* Biesta, G. and Miedema, S. (2000) considered it worthwhile to analyse Dewey's influence on educational reforms in Europe. They based their investigation on the changes in the German education system. They analysed the role of ideas and practices, made methodological observations, and in the course of a comparative assessment, they came to a new understanding of how it is that experience integrates knowledge.

The application of experience corresponding to reality

Experience gained in the field of emotions, necessities, wishes, certainties, strengths and weaknesses help us to know our own characteristics. Experience gained in competition, cooperation, sympathy, antipathy, giving, taking, helping, aggressivity, solidarity and attacks, help us to understand life in the community. In what we have to do beyond problem-solving, answering questions that we are asked, finding solutions to problems arising, fulfilling requests, discovering information is always there: the work of acquiring new experience (Cohn 1955 and 1975).

Our environment *changes* constantly. We also *change* partly because of influence brought to bear upon us, and partly because of endogenous developments. Our biological characteristics change, our attitudes change, the world around us changes.

Coping behaviour can be based on *coping-strategies*. The application of coping-strategies is fully effective if a person can overcome his difficulties, and his balance and integrity remain intact. The application of the strategy is partly effective if a person adapts himself to the tensions caused by failures, because he takes things as they are, or changes to accommodate himself to them. The strategy might cause damage, if some kind of illness or deformation sets in as a result of stress. Ineffectual strategies may end in the defeat of the person or the abandonment of the fight.

The living world is a place for discovering many strategies. The origins of strategies of hiding, attracting attention, orientation, meeting needs, etc. are almost impossible to track down; they are so richly present in the lives of living organisms. Strategies among populations (Czakó, 1991) can be more easily grouped. Among the most prominent ones are competition, mutuality, parasitism, and neutrality.

Humans apply strategies, which can be mostly characterised as rational because of man's essentially rational nature. We call these cognitive strategies. *Cognitive assessment* means that, by taking into consideration our abilities and requirements, we decide whether we are able to carry out a certain activity. This results in defining the next step in terms of concept, form, equipment and method. A coping person lives his life in an awareness of the fact that he can only get one step closer at a time even to the most faraway place. Coping is the continuous effort of a person advancing on his way to achieve his goal. Although human nature makes it possible to use cognitive assessment, we know that we do not always act rationally. Adult experience gives us the chance to admit that self-improvement has to be continuous, and that we must pay great attention to thinking. The realization of a life, which is rationally integrated is a continuous task. We have to bring ourselves repeatedly to a greater completeness; we have to retrain ourselves to make progress; and we have to retain our openness.

Accepting reality as a whole

Coping is a *real* struggle against imaginary windmills. The starting point for coping might be objective and transcendental real experience. When a person relates to an already experienced, to a certain extent already discovered piece of reality, he uses strategies, which might be effective or ineffective. Strategies rely on rationality.

Preserving health requires taking on accomplishable requirements, which requires *knowing our available competences*. As a result of the assessment of a given state, situation a person's integrity, physical, mental and community balance is preserved or remains needy and the state of imbalance presents itself. A person's vital and mental reactions that have lost his balance appear in kind of emergency reaction, which is followed by either inner anguish not decreasing by activity, or by anguish, which is gradually controlled by activity. A person living with anguish (1.) either restructures his life, as a way of avoiding the unavoidable, or if he cannot or does not want to avoid it then (2.) stays in a process which as a result of anguish harms the organism. This continuously harmful factor causes illness in the organism. According to medical experience as a result gastrointestinal ulcer, myocardial fibrillation, bradycardia, and certain form of acquired depression

can form. The state that can be controlled by activity can result in the appearance of two groups of events. It is also possible that through activity the person (3.) adapts himself to circumstances. He adjusts, in this case results in behaviour show the nature of adaptation. Those states, which can be controlled by activity (4.), might cause damage. The control, awareness, or discovering facts does not necessarily mean the ceasing or eradication of these processes. In this state, alcohol, drug or tobacco abuse, increase in sympathetic behaviour, e.g. rising blood pressure, increasing aggressivity, a tendency for suicide might lead to new forms of behaviour.

We can distinguish four possibilities based on controllability, and adaptivity used as criteria. These are groups formed by taking into consideration cognitivity, the build up of stress, activity and controllability (Kopp & Skrabski, 1995).

Pedagogy pays special attention to the acceptance and surveillance of other individuals. It has to be pointed out here, that Becker's combination chart, which contains the pairs of reasons and consequences regarding what kind of effects adults/teachers/educators and child/student/educated have on each other, emphasize these two criteria. In the relationship between educator and educated mutual *acceptance* and warm-heartedly *control* can be pointed out after fifty years of pedagogical research as the two key factors to be examined (Becker, 1964).

We can make distinction among *types of behaviour* formed by organizational, personal and communal factor. Behavioural diversity is a fact. At one point, everybody arrives at the same possibility of living through states and life situations. We reach the point, when the given behaviour has to be concerned in terms of maintaining it, keeping it, changing it or rejecting it. This obligation of consideration results from the fact that seeing his own and other individuals expectancies, together with his own capabilities a person has to decide what he is capable of, which aim can he possibly achieve, what he can undertake, what requirements he can meet rationally, preserving his integrity and balance. - A person making efforts to achieve a goal has to choose a coping strategy to overcome difficulties. The events separated by time enrich our foresight, judgement, and experience *according to how events refer to each other*. Based on the subsequent, understood, experienced facts a coping person makes efforts to achieve his goals with good chances. A person who cannot accept himself will harm himself too, and will be a burden for others.

Educating for coping

Coping is part of human life. Taking burdens, overcoming obstacles, overcoming counter effects is a part of our life. Coping is an English word, which means bargaining, discussion, and *struggle* when referring to human *activity*. Pedagogy is an English word, which means a) pedagogy, pedagogic, education, b) education studies, and didactics. - A teacher's knowledge develops constantly, an educator's behaviour changes continuously, a person moves on a path all his life, never arrives, he does not come to the point when he stops. All crises can be overcome successfully. We can step to a higher level from a crisis. Development involves stages of piled up and clearing down processes. Moving forward is realized through the successful closure of stages connected to each human age period. Coping and pedagogy, that is personal life leading, lifestyle and pedagogy mingled are together educating to cope.

The characteristics of each stage can be summarized. In *Erikson's description* during infancy (Erikson, 1968) mutuality, in small childhood the capability of own initiatives, while during puberty skills are formed, the teenager identifies with his tasks. Adulthood is an important part of forming our self-identity, which is formed by becoming aware and assessing of time perspectives, assertiveness, role flexibility, the ability to react. Adulthood develops a man's or a woman's awareness of self-identity furthermore. An adult leads, cooperates with peers, evaluates, and discovers his own personal sphere. During seniority responsibility felt for younger people is emphasized, the personality becomes full. - Obviously it is possible to fail in coping. As a result of this in childhood a person remains locked in himself in the process of development. As a small child self-uncertainty, bad conscience will keep him locked, during puberty the feeling of inferiority and unworthiness can imprison the person. Further damage is done in adulthood. These are identity problems, losing perspectives by overvaluing the present, self-worry, role rigidity, frozen behaviour, sexual difficulties, authority problems, value problems, and loneliness. The list of loss during seniority includes hopelessness and a complete halt. - *An adult educator corresponding to his or her age* is capable of educating consciously as a result of skills moving us forward and gaps causing loss.

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