



## Forum

In the first article of EEF\*Net, No. 1/1999, page 3-9, education is described as being a goal oriented process.

I have two points which I would like to explain:

Education cannot have a goal, and change cannot be a goal.

Education is a process basic assumption. (starting point)

1. Education is a process in which young people are accompanied by adults so as to develop self\*reliance. This does not mean, that the process of education is a process from the top down, or from the bottom up. I think education is a process of relationships, in which young people and adults are on a path together, and so influence each other, or in other words, they learn from each other. But at the beginning of the educational process young people learn more from adults, than adults from young people, for adults have more experience. That does not mean that adults are always in the "right". But education is a learning process. That learning process, the way they have to go, has no goals, has no aims that must be achieved. If you persist in thinking of goals, then the way, the process is the goal itself. For a process has no goal, but does not have (some) starting\*points. These starting\*points can be values and/or norms.

In EEF\*Net 1/1999, the goal of education is described in a very special and negative term: "change". ("Education for change" and "change through education"). You cannot formulate that in this way.

If you speak of °changeç as the goal there must be something wrong, for there has to be a need to change it. If something needs to change, we should speak of two situations: a goal that has been, and an other one that will come. (An old goal and a new one). Where you speak of change as a goal, I would prefer

to call it a °replacement\*goalç: it replaces something that was no good as a goal.

When you speak of °change" as a goal, you have to formulate the contents of the goal. But in the article nothing is satisfactory formulated. Neither of the former goal, nor of the new ones. But a goal has a content, and we cannot speak of °an open approach", that clearly identifies the educator's own educational options. The options are for example values or norms. When we want to change, or to transform them, it is not the goal, but the effect of an evaluation. Or is it your own bias, that education is a "distribution from top to bottom"? And do you want to change that and why?

What is wrong with it, especially when you refer to Paulo Freire. He introduced his method from the top down. And people liked to do his way. (I mention that Paulo Freire method is one of the best methods for self\*reliance, but Freire came from the top).

You do not change the goal of education, but it is your own bias "fear" (page 4) that must be changed. In that case it is called a conclusion of an evaluation: what ever was not right has to be replaced, and to be done in another way. (I prefer not to use the "better", which suggests the result of evaluation. It is another discussion point, but here for me there is no "better", only "different". And especially when we are speaking of future things like goals, which we have not evaluated).

A goal can be reformulated, only after an evaluation. Change means that the goal had not been well formulated, or did not work in practice. But "change" as a goal is impossible.

When we are speaking of a goal, not enough attention is paid to the process, the method. We are focussed on the goal, there in the distance, without thinking of the process, here and now. I prefer to speak of starting points (basic assumptions), and we must attend to these, for they are essential for the process.

Education is like our lifetime: there is a life process, and not a life goal. When we speak of the goal of our life, then it is here and now, and not something that must be reached in the future, or after our earthly life.

And now your article, the most urgent need for educators, is to redefine norms and value systems.

But that is impossible. A value is a universal concept which never loses its validity. A value cannot be altered, only interpreted, and so we formulate norms.

One of the universal values is love. This concept can be interpreted in different ways, but as a value, love is always love.

For some psychologists the interpretation is: to love yourself before you can love others. For some theologians: to love the other, is the same as to love myself. Buber translates the commandment to love: "love your neighbour, he is like you."

The philosopher Levinas translates: "love your neighbour, you exist in that act of loving you are the love you have for your neighbour." For Levinas the other is more important than I am: to love my neighbour is my loving action for the other. To redefine norms is possible, only when evaluation reveals that there should be a change of interpretation of the value. Change means that the world itself is changing. Education too is changing, but we cannot say that it is in crisis, or that the educator is in crisis. It is like our life: we all develop as individuals and therefore so do educators. What we need when necessary \* to re\*interpret, to re\*explain our values. And therefore I would wish to argue for education with basic assumptions, but without goals.

In my faith I can only think in terms of from starting points. When I "describe" Jesus, I say that he lived and worked from God. God is love, so he gave love to people. Therefore he could say: I am the way (of love). On that way (of love) he met people and taught them to love one another. (So you will do more than is usual, Matth. 5: 47). So his life, the way of love, was a way of showing love, here and now, and not for a goal in the future. For him life was a process with the basic principle "to love", and not with the goal "to love". (His love would come too late, for he did not reach the goal).

For education it is the same thing: it is also a process. This is a more exciting thing, it is also more uncertain than education with goals, always "playing safe".

The process of education is grounded on basic principles. During this process we have to look back to these basic assumptions, in an evaluation, to see if we are still using them, or we have to renew, or to change them.

One of the most important basic principles of education I taught my students in a teacher training college, was "to take the other person seriously". It sounds very easy, but in practice we do not do it, especially not in educational situations, at school. Let me clarify this point by two examples:

When a pupil asks a teacher something, the teacher usually gives him an immediate answer. He puts him off with his answer, so he shows he does not take either the question or the pupil seriously.

Anyway the pupil is not waiting for that particular answer from the teacher. It is one of the many answers there are, and a pupil does not need the teacher's answer, he needs his opinion: and the teacher needs insight into why a pupil asks the question.

When a teacher asks a pupil something, most of the time the pupil has to give the answer the teacher wants, or an answer that will satisfy the teacher. Here the teacher makes a mistake, for first he asks the pupil a question, to which the teacher thinks he knows the answer, and next he expects the pupil to give him the answer he has in mind. In this futile performance he clearly does not take the pupil seriously.

The philosopher E. Levinas speaks about a relationship between the other and me, in which the other looks me in the eyes, and begs me: do not kill me. By this he means: do not deny me, do not deny my question.

In both examples the teacher is engaged in totalizing (enveloping) the pupil, (Levinas) and that is not the basic principle of our Christian education. So evaluation makes it clear that we do not have to change the basic principle, but, rather the practical side of our process of education.

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At this year's spring session held in Fulda/Germany on 20th and 21st of April, the Committee for Ecumenical Mission and Service (ÖMW) focussed on the Church's role in education as a part of ecumenical responsibility and how this could be affected by the restructuring of the Association of the Churches' Development Services (AGKED) currently being planned.

Christianity was clearly a movement of learning right from its beginnings, said Professor Ulrich Becker from Hanover, an expert on religious education and one-time director of the World Council of Churches Unit on Education and Renewal, who gave the keynote address. There is thus a close link between the Church's ministry to pass on the Gospel and help people to live out their faith independently in every-day decisions and the preconditions for, methods and objectives of education. Prof. Becker's main thesis was that a Church which wants to be a Church of the Word and of Scripture, that adheres to a culture of clear speech and of comprehensible argumentation on faith has to make continuous efforts to ensure learning on the part of those who belong to it. The objective of this process is to enable Christians to become mature and self-reliant. This means that faith and learning are interdependent, and education is an indispensable task for the churches.

The ÖMW \* a committee of the Association of Churches and Missions in Germany (Evangelisches Missionswerk, EMW) in Hamburg \* participates in this mission of the churches in a spirit of ecumenical responsibility. It provides expert guidance to the EMW desks (Operational Support, Service in Society, Communication and Theological Education) which support programmes in church-run schools, adult education, Christian academies, youth and student work, training in the area of Christian communication, and theological formation.

Ulrich Becker put four criteria for ecumenical education up for discussion:

- The fundamental dimension of ecumenical learning is that the struggle for truth has taken

the place of mere assertions. Dialogue and conciliarity are the watch-words of church educational work.

- This kind of learning is a deliberate attempt to expose ourselves to the \*otherness\* of a different world of everyday experience in order to look at our own situation in the mirror of what is distant and alien to us.

- Christians have to learn and practise the conciliatory struggle for truth and make it into something that can be experienced. The aim is not to treat one's own truth as an absolute but to really listen to the view of the other person. This is the only way of reaching understanding and reconciliation.

- If church educational work is to take its ecumenical dimension seriously, it will have to let itself be judged by how well it participates in the life and suffering of those who are imprisoned, deserted, exploited or oppressed.

On the basis of these criteria there is one crucial question which must be asked in view of current plans to restructure the German church development service: How will the essential preconditions and the framework required for education in an ecumenical perspective be put on a firm footing and guaranteed in the new structure? What are the criteria for deciding on its priorities? According to Ulrich Becker, there is no denying the fact that church educational work is in danger of losing out in competition with worship and pastoral care at a time of centralisation and dwindling financial resources. There is quite some disagreement as to the priority of church responsibility for education. How can we make sure there is enough time and room for manoeuvre for learning processes to develop if efficiency control puts us under pressure to produce quick results? Who is going to monitor, provide guidance and advice for these long-term educational processes if specialised AG KED committees are to be abolished by the end of the year and staff on the desks no longer have experts they can consult? These and more questions have yet to be answered.

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