

21. Denis Goldberg in Education – Thoughts on Teaching Methodology

By Dodo Schulz

Comparable standards, frameworks of competence, chains of effectiveness, criteria of quality – these are just some of the expressions which are very popular in the educational discourse of today. To analyse what importance meeting Denis Goldberg can have for the development of the personalities of young people in this context is not easy, because it is a very complex matter. Colleagues relate things from pedagogical practice. They describe the respect of the children and young people for Denis Goldberg's life achievement, his role as an example for upright, unprejudiced and humane dealings with one another, for his personal stand on the dignity of all human beings. And they tell of the lasting effects which the meetings with Denis Goldberg result in, the activities of the pupils who support his work for the people of South Africa. These are concrete, individual and personal reports.

Here I am considering the reasons why meetings with a contemporary witness like Denis Goldberg are important in education from the point of view of methodology.

Descriptions of the aims of learning processes of formal and non-formal education are contained, among others, in the 'core teaching plans' for the school, the 'orientation framework on global development' and the concept 'education for lasting development.' In all the relevant documents they are described as competencies.

According to Weinert competencies are 'the cognitive abilities and skills available to the individuals or learnable by them to solve particular problems and to be able to use motivational, volitional and social forms of preparedness and abilities connected to them to solve problems in variable situations successfully and responsibly.' (26) In the documents it is a question of different competency concepts

which, however, have intersections. (This does not seem to me the right place for an intensive analysis of intersections.) In my view intersection can be grasped with the aid of Professor Christel Adick's didactic cube on the structuring of global learning. (27) This analytical tool helps in working out lines of argument for the choice and design of suitable learning situations for the development of competencies. It contains three dimensions which together form a network of aspects interwoven with each other.

The first dimension of the didactic cube demands that learning should contribute to the passing on of culture, and at the same time convey knowledge and contribute to the formation of conscience. Denis Goldberg brings to his educational encounters a profound knowledge, and not only as a construction engineer. Above all he contributes his reflective contemporary knowledge and his personal experiences from the time of Apartheid and the time of the transformation of South Africa into a free and democratic society.

At the same time he understands very well how to explain the perspective of an individual story against the background of the social, political and societal context. Achieving this comprehensibly is for him a matter relating both to his homeland of South Africa and to his role as an active, creative world citizen. In the process he passes on his knowledge of the history of South Africa and the current political situation, and/or reflects, according to the particular audience, on the comparability of the unjust regime in South Africa in the time of Apartheid with that in Germany during National Socialism [Nazism].

Also at the same time Denis Goldberg makes clear why he decided on resistance against the Apartheid system, how and why he still actively participates in the formation of society and how he found his way to this point of view. With his reflective experience of the development of South African society he describes and analyses the challenges, chances and potential for peaceful coexistence of different cultures and social milieus in his country. Denis Goldberg always draws a connecting line to the society of his listeners and partners in conversation and emphasizes the common themes.

Explaining interactions between the local and the global and between the individual and society is placed as a second dimension in the didactic cube. Denis Goldberg connects his individual action as a fighter for equal chances in life for people regardless of origin,

religion, sex or social status in South Africa with the analysis of global structures of inequality in access to education, resources and prosperity. “Interactions of different social dimensional contexts from the individual up to world society” additionally become clear when, for example, he discusses the question of water provision for the disadvantaged population of South Africa together with the strategies of privatisation of public property in other countries, and the profits of global water concerns.

The third and last dimension of the didactic cube arises from the historical axis. This is intended to give the transmitted knowledge a perspective in which past, present and future are interwoven with each other in many ways. (28) With extracts from his biography chosen according to his target group, Denis Goldberg bears witness to the fact that history and the future are made by human beings. He made the personal decision that his life would be determined in the first place by the freedom struggle and only in the second place by the family. To this day Denis Goldberg does all he can to help overcome the heritage of Apartheid, for example through his wide-ranging involvement in the place where he lives in Hout Bay, a suburb of Cape Town, in which the social and ethnic groups still live very separately from each other. Through this activity, but also through his reading tours, his lectures in pedagogical contexts, he participates in the formation of the present and future in South Africa, here in Germany, and everywhere in the world where Denis also has been and is on reading and lecture tours.

Denis Goldberg is a contemporary witness to the political resistance in South Africa and works for the transformation of his country into a free, equal, democratic society. In particular it is by this element of his personality, that he takes up a standpoint of his own based on individually acquired knowledge and experiences, and out of this derives his own action and lives consistently, and so contributes to society – even while painfully forgoing several things generally taken for granted, for example, living with his family – this is what makes the respect for this elderly, wise South African grow amongst young and old.

The reflection which is often forthcoming in meetings with him, that he could have chosen other paths to take, makes it clear to listeners and partners in conversation that in the conduct of one’s own

life, in private or wider matters, as a world citizen, it is a matter of making reasoned decisions in order to then be able to act. I myself have often enough heard how Denis Goldberg in these sequences of the most varied conversations very expressly emphasizes that doing nothing is also an alternative and that it can have far-reaching consequences. Here he likes to link things to the reality of life for the pupils: how do things stand as regards cooperation, standing up for each other in solidarity, resistance to bullying, to social or religious exclusion, for example – and with this he is right in the middle of their everyday experience.

When Denis Goldberg describes the situations from his own life which have shaped his attitudes, the listeners learn quite concretely how views and motives can arise as the basis for individual action. He traces how the inhumanity of Apartheid and his deep feeling for justice, gained from his family, awoke his readiness to take responsibility for social and political goals. And so we connect again to the first dimension of the didactic cube. Instruction should teach normative reflection, contribute to the creation of conscience. Through the variety of his personal experiences, objective analyses and credible wisdom, Denis Goldberg demonstrates that this cannot be taught in a one-dimensional and linear way, but that to create this a multitude of influences and of learning situations combine. Thus he shows, without obvious intention, by example, how complex learning processes are and must be applied in order for human beings to be prepared and in the position to take on responsibility, to achieve competence in action or decision making. And so I am back to the starting point of my considerations, the descriptions of the goals of learning processes, the competencies.

Meetings with you, Denis, are learning experiences, which affect each individual in different ways. They support the goal of gaining the ability to act in the global world and of shaping one's life with responsibility for oneself and society in small and large matters from a standpoint of solidarity, standing up for justice. These are good and sufficient reasons to invite you into lessons.

To you, dear Denis, I wish continuing good health, and strength to continue your meetings with people in pedagogical contexts. It enriches my life that I have already for so long been able to accompany you as a friend. For this, my heartfelt thanks to you!

(26) Franz E. Weinert 2001, Leistungsmessungen in Schulen, 271 ff.

(27) Ein Modell zur didaktischen Struktuiierung des globalen Lernens. Bildung und Erziehung 55, 2002, Volume 4, Pp 397 – 416.

(28) Cf. Christel Adick.

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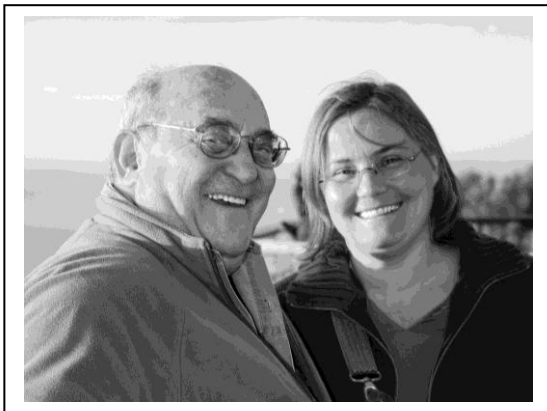


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