**„Und das Gesetz nur kann uns Freiheit geben“** (Goethe)

**Diagnosis-based pedagogy in the work with children and youngsters displaying special behavioural problems**

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*Abstract*

The encounter with children and youngsters displaying special behavioural problems demands high pedagogical intuition and courage for unorthodox procedures. But how can decisions in single cases, exceptions and special regulations be justified? How can they be legitimized against the objection of arbitrariness and subjectivity?

The lecture paraphrases Goethe‘s sonnet on art and nature from the viewpoint of a professional position based on several professions between pedagogy and psychology. A game of thoughts – referring to examples of problematic cases in everyday school life. A plea for “the other view”, for loyalty to the laws, responsible freedom and, if need be, civil disobedience.

After 40 years of service in schools I think I know what the strongest points of us pedagogical professionals are: experience and intuition. And I also tell you what in my opinion our weakest points are: experience and intuition.

My talk will be a dialectic meandering between freedom and law, between decisions according to instinct and according to reason, between heeding and ignoring rules. That our pedagogical ship is not wrecked as a “fools‘ ship”, that’s taken care of by a pilot: our responsibility.

Our work, sometimes our reputation, too, is often difficult because in our matter only few things are unambiguous. Each of you has probably experienced several “truths” in your pedagogical professional life. Many of them led to changes of the paradigms, registered in regulations, directives and laws.

That’s why I begin my reflections by a relativizing quotation by Hermann Hesse. In his Chinese Legend, of 1959, he puts the following statement in a wise mandarin’s mouth:

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“There is reality, and there is no doubt about that. Truths, however, that is to say opinions about reality, expressed in words, are innumerable. And each of them is as correct as it is wrong.”

***One reality – many truths***

The quotation from Hesse makes us suspect something about the pressure of decision to which all pedagogically active persons are subjected, professionals as well as amateurs, professional educators as well as parents. Permanently we notice realities and coordinate them with current truths. That means permanent presence and readiness to decide.

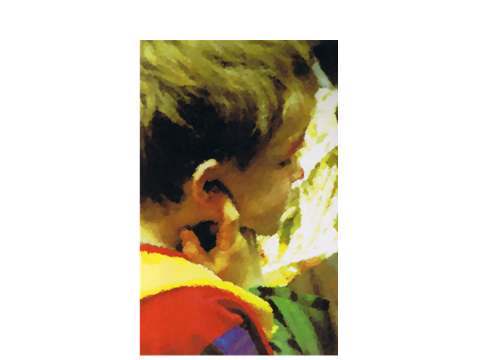
I don’t mean that as a complaint. The engine driver, the pilot, the taxi driver who made us get here to Trier were under pressure of acting, too. They and human beings in a lot of other professions and trades must decide umpteen times a day just as we pedagogues, always quickly, always according to the situation. We do that, as it is said so well, to the best of our knowledge and beliefs. Fortunately our state of knowledge keeps its validity for quite a while. The formula for calculating the braking distance for ex. remains quite lasting. And stopping at red on the traffic lights is an agreement that nobody will change quite soon.

It’s different with the human and social sciences. In medicine there is, in spite of its large intersection set with natural science considered as quite objective, permanent change and alterations. What was correct yesterday, is questionable today, sometimes even appears to be wrong.

It was for ex. formerly a rule to lie quietly for a long time after operations. Nowadays just operated persons are put on their legs quickly. Or let’s think of medical “wisdom of the people”. After small burns it was formerly said “no water on it at all!” “Immediately under cold water!” That’s what is recommended nowadays. Looking back you smile at several former doctrines. Some things are rather embarrassing. So sometimes after a change of a paradigm you want to ask for forgiveness in retrospect.

*The case of Jannik*

So I would still today like to ask the forgiveness of the eleven-year-old whom you see on this photo – consciously made a little out of focus.



That photo belongs among the most humiliating photos of the chronicles of our school, which I wrote for 25 years for my former school in the psychiatric hospital for children and youngsters at Cologne. It shows an episode of school carnival. Let’s enter shortly into the scene:

All groups have gathered for the celebration in the hall. The school orchestra plays – no “chamber music”, it is carnival. Most children are in their best mood. But Jannik makes trouble as often! Like in singing circles in the morning he shuts his ears and thus demonstrates his disrespect for the common event. He continues during the celebration what he shows as anti-social behaviour at a lot of group activities during school life.

In Jannik‘s plan of special instruction it says “capability of taking part in group life”. After all he is going to move to a secondary school soon. Withdrawing behaviour refusing the community that’s what we pedagogues don’t want to tolerate with Jannik - or even reward it with special arrangements. He must get through the carnival celebration! Here we are along the same lines as the clinical psychologists and their detailed plans for behavioural therapy. We demand a consequential educational behaviour of ourselves. Steadfastness belongs among the ideal line of our staff. It counts among our professional truth, it’s our unwritten law.

But why does this photo still make us ashamed after years? I think, the special education pedagogues among you will suspect it. The scene described is an excursion into the early 1990ies. With Jannik we assumed a “hyperkinetic disturbance of social behaviour”. In the medical key to diagnosis, the ICD 10, there was the number F 90. 1 for it, and it attested the boy what we today rather know under the label ADHS. Formerly “hyperkinetic disturbance” were the preferred “words of truth” for a reality which we experienced with the eleven-year-old in everyday life.

Nowadays for the same reality other “words of truth” have been added. Those, too, will have long since been guessed by the special education pedagogues among you. As an explanation for Jannik‘s withdrawing oppositional behaviour there have been added in the meantime “autism-spectrum-disturbances”. Those would have described the boy’s reality at that time more fittingly. But in the early 1990ies they were still to a great extent unusual. The number F 84.5 for the “Asperger syndrome” was only just entering the ICD.

What does Jannik‘s example teach us, what does it warn of?

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From reality we often derive “truths” rashly.

Stating results and symptoms, however, is no diagnosis yet.

At the time we acted to our best intentions, when we insisted on Jannik’s taking part in the carnival celebration. Of course, nowadays no reasonable pedagogue would oblige an Asperger autist to participate in such a school event. Of course, we would talk with the boy about the oncoming event as a preparation, and of course, we would offer him alternative possibilities in the school building. Jannik would have been helped in that way. For today we know: part of the autist character is often an extreme oversensitivity of the sensual perception. A carnival orchestra may even play joyous songs, for an autist they can be “acoustic torture” and border on bodily injury (cp. Attwood, 2000).

By liberating Jannik from participating in the carnival event he would have been helped. But what then about the other children? We have to deal with a school class. What about those who don’t want to participate in the carnival in the hall for totally different reasons? Apart from Jannik there are Pauls and Leons who would prefer to crack their cowboy pistols in the court. There is pre-puberty Maximilian, who would prefer to withdraw with Marie of class 4 into a corner. Is free time for them, too, during the celebration the correct decision? Not at all!

*One symptom – three diagnoses*

Let’s reduce Jannik‘s conspicuous behaviour in a simplifying manner to the concept “opposition”. That is a fitting description of part of Jannik‘s school reality. In medicine that would be the statement on an observation. But thus, however, there hasn’t yet been described what problem Jannik has and what help he needs. Starting from the little I have up till now told about the eleven-year-old, we could arrive at at least three diagnoses by differentiating diagnosis:

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Differentiating diagnosis, Jannik: ADHS, ASS or deficit in education?

Symptom

**Oppositional behaviour**

↓

Diagnosis

← ↓ →

Educational deficit AD(H)S ASS

↓ ↓ ↓

Indication Indication Indication

↓ ↓ ↓

Pedagogy, if needed Pedagogy, if needed Psychotherapy +

+ help for young people + psychotherapy pedagogy

Jannik could just suffer from a pedagogical deficit. He could have a “milieu disturbance” and be downright not educated and for that reason appear inappropriate in his social behaviour. Then the offers of help would have to be exclusively in the pedagogical system, with older children – if needed - measures of help for young people could be added. The cause for the oppositional behaviour could also go back to ADHS. Hyperkinetic disturbance of social behaviour does exist indeed and not only – as in Jannik‘s case - as a wrong diagnosis. Then the offers of help would have to be a coordinated mixture of pedagogy and psychotherapy/ psychoeducation, if needed together with a paediatric counsel. Jannik, however, - as said before – suffered from an autism-spectrum-disturbance (ASS). There measures of youth psychiatry diagnostics must be given priority before pedagogical objectives.

So for Jannik the last of the three possible diagnoses was relevant. But in his learners‘ group *all three* forms of disturbances were present, partly in multiple form. That constellation is everyday experience in German schools. For the teacher, for ex. of a primary school, that is a very great challenge. Because for the same form of disturbance it’s not only necessary to state different aetiological classifications, i. e. causes for the disturbances. From there in particular different consequences for acting must be drawn. Some of them even are contradictory.

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No indication/ measure without previous diagnosis

In medicine this kind of thinking has tradition. For example, from the observation backache no plan of treatment can be derived yet. It all depends on where the cause can be detected, if the patient is a case for the orthopaedic, for the neurologist or for the psychotherapist. Contrary to that, pupils with extremely different forms of problems stay with the teacher with whom they have been allocated – mostly according to their age. If the teacher were a cook, he/she would have to prepare each set meal for the class in multiple and very various forms.

For our example Jannik it would be necessary, as the acoustic oversensitivity is caused by his basic autist disturbance, to offer niches and free time during group activities comprising more classes. That would neither be preferential treatment nor cheap softness or even indifference, but the teacher follows the current professional opinion. Well understood: with ASS!

But if the pupil had ADHS, or if he were “only” downright uneducated, then such exceptions would be counterproductive. Then one might, even would have to demand some pedagogically measured effort for keeping the rules at the school celebration, too. Of course, that may lead to conflicts, sometimes even a little fight results out of it. But through that the pupil might grow. How should a child with ADHS practise postponement of tension, direction of impulses and domestication of emotions, if all fields of conflict were withheld from him/her?

If a child comes from a problematic home, a milieu unable to educate or even antisocial, a school celebration would even be a chance to distinguish oneself. Instead of niches for withdrawing the school would have to offer such a child rather more possibilities by which it can gain applause on the school stage quickly by means of an easily understandable task. Such a child could experience here for the first time that awareness of rules and discipline can lead to success and acknowledgement.

An Asperger autist with acoustic oversensitivity like Jannik on the other hand will experience the compulsory participation in the school carnival as an aggressive unreasonable demand. When he shuts his ears or runs off shouting, that is self-protection. The boy is right, even if his behaviour is not correct.

***Pedagogical responsibility between school laws and didactic freedom***

How does the example of the same symptom and the three different diagnoses fit into our overall topic “Law – freedom – responsibility”?

Teaching and education don’t happen in a space without laws. On the contrary particularly public education is subject to manifold regulations. There are school laws and for the curricula directives have been formulated. Teachers at public schools in Germany are obliged by instructions by the state and therefore as a rule civil servants. Their work isn’t only paid, but also controlled. But different from authoritarian systems of society, it’s not schemes of teaching into which all have to be forced that are propagated. For it is not less clearly ruled by laws that the *individual preconditions of a child* must be taken into account.

The legal demand of the collective – and among it compulsory school attendance belongs – corresponds with the legally guaranteed right of individual support. It’s the task of teachers to bring into line those demands from various directions. By means of examples you can formulate and recommend performance that can be operationalised, but you cannot fix it. That’s where the teacher’s freedom is. There he/she is to a large extent left on his/her own. It’s there that intuition and experience come to fruition.

John Hattie (2013) has proved with his worldwide study causing a sensation that the personality of the teacher is the most effective factor in the learning process in school classes. It is more effective than group numbers, homogeneous or heterogeneous age groups, more effective than rooms and equipment of a school.

Experience and intuition are the capital of a teacher’s personality. But they are not measurable soft skills. They can – as said before – be strong and weak points at the same time. They become weak points if the teacher’s use of his/her didactic freedom is interpreted as subjectivity or even arbitrariness. Teachers must assume that learners’ groups expect equal treatment. That goes without saying on the one hand, but it becomes a problem, if it is connected with the shortcut opinion “equal means just”.

If different limits, different measures are applied within the same group of pupils, the teacher could be reproached for violation of justice. She can meet that danger by making her responsibility recognizable. And to that there belong knowledge and information, about the “truths” of other disciplines as well.

That’s the reason why I wanted to present Jannik to you as an exemplary case. Supporting that boy means evaluating diverging instructions – legal preconditions – and overcoming supposed contradictions. With Jannik there are in opposition: on the one hand the educational instruction for achieving capability for the group and on the other hand the right of an autist child to protection against social and acoustic overburdening (cp. Frey/ Wertgen, 2012).

In the course of the two last decades the school ministries have accepted exceptions and special conditions for autism in the school laws. The technical term for that is “compensation of disadvantages”. Today teachers can refer to that, if other pupils or parents might reproach them for preferment of others.

Directives and laws, however, are the last stage of a long process. That can last for twenty or more years. But the phenomena didn’t look different at all at the beginning of the process. Children like Jannik needed some free time already in times before a directive conceded it to them.

Directives and laws only grasp the reality of life in retrospect. But what about the time in between? That’s when we teachers must act nevertheless. Before the experts found out that autists could be oversensitive to noises, those who were together with them every day felt that it was necessary to deviate from existing norms. Before the puzzle stones of results of research make a reliable picture, there remains only our intuition, if we want to do justice to situations and individuals. Those are the situations in which we often cannot refer to legal directives. Acting intuitively sometimes makes us remain “alone on our own” from a legal point of view.

So what about those interim times in which we think we notice a problem, but our legitimisation for acting isn’t yet backed by a law? Perhaps then the word of the Bible is fitting about “the Sabbath that was made for the human being” and not the other way round. With respect to societal politics we then move towards “civil disobedience”. A quite dangerous concept, but according to my experience in my profession and my life not without justification.

One of the most impressive examples of civil disobedience I came to know immediately at the beginning of my school life. It was in 1970, when the children of the “Contergan catastrophe” of that time had arrived at the age of compulsory school attendance. A lot of them had, because of the diagnosis “unfit for life”, gone from the hospital where they were born immediately to institutional homes. They survived. Now the next wrong prognosis followed, when to a lot of them “unfit for formation” was attested. It was teachers – indeed they were predominantly women – who supported these children without a legal basis in the existing school systems. Sometimes these were primary schools, sometimes special schools or hospital schools. De jure school attendance there was illegal.

Today we know that several of those harmed by Contergan have graduated from secondary schools and even studied at universities. As a young teacher of special education I have myself taught youngsters with diverse kinds of handicaps who, following those handicapped by Contergan and getting much attention, attended a school with 10, 12, or even 15 years for the first time. Within a decade out of illegal beginnings lawful claims, curricula for pupils, courses of studies for pedagogues and obligations for buildings for authorities maintaining schools had developed.

In later years as head of the department I was, together with my staff in youth psychiatry, several times confronted with situations in which we decided against the existing state of rules in order to do justice to a certain group of clients. That was potential stuff for disciplinary proceedings. Fortunately we could argue for our “misbehaviour” during examinations in such a way that instead of measures according to the service code political discourses were initiated. At their end a formerly illegal proceeding turned into a better state of directives. The control office then built golden bridges by documenting the breach of rules, but stating at the same time that the existing state of directives did no more correspond to the reality of life and the state of research.

Taking part in group life was as correct for pupils at Jannik‘s primary school time as it is today. But that objective isn’t valid at all costs. As we learn from the knowledge of other disciplines, in this case from research on autism, that measures are not good for all, I must be allowed to take my freedom to vary aims and methods, even to ignore directives if needed. That reference to the state of research is part of the responsibility which alone guides us when we occasionally move between law and freedom in a vacuum.

*The freedom to use other professional disciplines optimizes one’s own pedagogical competences.*

When I reported about Jannik, concepts such as symptom, diagnosis, aetiology, indication were used. These are primarily technical terms with a medical connotation. Partly psychology uses them, too. And also in technical fields of work the concepts “symptom” and “diagnosis” are current. For ex. garages make diagnoses, before they start repairing an engine trouble. We pedagogues on the other hand use those concepts rather rarely; most likely when there is the question of registering partial deficits in performance or making up for them by support programmes.

I want to encourage us pedagogues to open ourselves to such categories of thinking of other disciplines. Not in order to promote a medicinalisation of pedagogy, but in order to optimize our own pedagogical competences (cp. Oelsner 2013, 274). By committing ourselves to knowledge of other disciplines we gain freedom of acting in our own fields.

By arguing exceptions and deviations by means of the standards of knowledge of other disciplines we manage to leave the dangerous zone in which we could be reproached for arbitrariness. If I insist on demanding that Leon suffering from ADS and Maximilian harmed by his milieu have to adapt themselves to the group discipline of a school celebration, that Jannik on the other hand is allowed to spend the time for ex. at the laptop in the library, it’s not just depending on what I feel, but behind it there are pedagogical concepts both for ADHS children, for socially deprived children, and for those with ASS.

Of course it is demanding to know and learn to understand the particularities of various forms of disturbances. And superficially it may look like curtailing our pedagogical autonomy if I follow the instructions of other disciplines. My professional experience teaches me the opposite, namely that the “laws of the others” give me freedom of acting and optimize my own competence (cp. Oelsner 2015). From this viewpoint as well Goethe’s saying “Denn das Gesetz nur kann uns Freiheit geben” can be paraphrased.

By taking the autism-spectrum disturbances for highlighting I have obviously presented a very special case out of the field of children and youth psychiatry as an example. I would like to sketch very roughly another complex of symptoms, which might be known to you better than the – fortunately – rather rare phenomenon autism.

I’m talking about school absenteeism. Here, too, my wording gets a medical touch, but only because of a didactic intention. Medical doctors need a diagnosis before they state an indication, that is to say act and treat. In pedagogy the diagnosis – even it is not called so – is the precondition for didactic decisions.

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*Example school absenteeism: one symptom – three diagnoses*

Symptom

**Refusal of school attendance**

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School absenteeism School fear School phobia

↓ ↓ ↓

Indication Indication Indication

↓ ↓ ↓

Help for young people Pedagogy Psychotherapy/

if needed, as inpatient

By the term school absenteeism first only the symptom is clear: A pupil stays away from school in spite of the obligation to school attendance. As evident as the phenomenon is, as ambiguous are the possible diagnoses: a) “absenteeism” as a consequence of a rather antisocial problem, b) “school fear” as an expression of being asked too much in performance or social respect, or c) “fear of separation” (also labelled “school phobia”). Mixed forms are imaginable, too (cp. Lehmkuhl & Oelsner 2004; Hopf 2014).

Establishing clarity here is everything else but a purely academic question. It is of central importance in order to take the correct pedagogical measures. For these would be with a) a predominantly pedagogical indication, including help to young people and projects for pupils tired of school. With b) the system school itself is primarily challenged to take measures of encouragement and individual support, when asking too much in performance, to propose a change of the curriculum, if needed, or to offer mediation programmes for social fear. With c) the school is only the occasion, not the real cause of the symptoms and is therefore only able to achieve little by activities. For solving the problem of separation primarily psychotherapeutic indication is necessary.

While with school fear the individual pressure ought to be taken away from the pupil, it is recommended not to reduce it with school phobia. It’s even more helpful to punish wrong behaviour by official consequences more severely, so that a treatment of the fear of separation is realized, if needed as an inpatient, too. School inspections that concede home teaching instead of that act counterproductively. The measure pushes one file “from the table” for the moment, but it reinforces the symptom (ibid. S.126).

***Freedom and responsibility in a “diagnostic vacuum”***

Diagrams are characterised by making facts appear easily understandable, almost obvious. In reality, however, the ways are less clear, more likely crooked, branched and overlapping. Moreover it takes some time before we get diagnostic support by other disciplines. But the child is there a long time before.

What is therefore to be done when everything is still not clear, but we must act? Then we act – free and responsible.

In our special school in the department of child and youth psychiatry we have elaborated a repertory of guidelines for such situations. Those should prevent us from incapability to act, but also minimize mistakes and injustices – caused by lack of knowledge. Binding ourselves to such core statements also protects us against a possible reproach for arbitrariness.

Among such guidelines you will find for ex. the following ones:

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- Children do nothing without a cause. We don’t understand it yet. Neither do they.

- Preventing the worse is always a meaningful aim!

- Burdened children need protection and support. If both together are not possible to the same degree at the same time, protection has priority over support.

- Children that feel protected generally make up for the learning stuff by unorthodox ways**.**

To be able to work with pupils with special behavioural problems I must have the freedom to take the time until the still undiscovered meaning of their supposed nonsense can be recognised. But I can only take this attitude if I am not under pressure to have to grasp reality by means of rash truths. I need the freedom of “the other view”.

Calmness instead of brash hyperactivity – that sounds reasonable. Thus however I risk a temporary vacuum of competences. That collides with the aforementioned pressure to act which reality demands of us in every second of lived life. At this point I introduce a concept into the talk which stems from a therapeutic context, which, however, in principle is of the same importance in pedagogy, particularly in special pedagogy, although it is not called that way: Containment (Winnicott 1973).

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What is to be done, if my measures do not (yet) work? - I can always offer containment.

I can for ex. say to a problematic pupil about whom I do not yet know exactly “what way the wind is blowing”: “It is difficult. It’s difficult for you, but it’s also difficult for us two. But that doesn’t upset us. Problems needn’t have the last word.”

“Containing” doesn’t mean “tolerating everything” or worse “spoiling”. Containment as an attitude also means that a teacher, by means of his/her behaviour, gives a living example to the learners‘ group how you can react to various peculiarities of a problematic fellow pupil. The teacher so to say lives alternatives to teasing, depreciating comments, laughing, or exclusion.

This emphasis on the teacher’s personality doesn’t put the case for unbound subjectivity. His/her free autonomous acting is bound – let’s think of Jannik – to professional diagnostic basics of other disciplines. In order to remain trustworthy, those basics must also be “interpreted” for the learners‘ group – and their parents, too. That protects us against the suspicious stigmas of lack of control, arbitrariness, or weakness. In the end being bound to knowledge and the obligation for transparency set us free for individual measures. That also serves to discipline our own emotions. For that’s what is challenged particularly much by pupils with special behavioural problems.

Among containment by us teachers we must also count that we keep our eyes on our core task – fixed by the law. And that is “teaching” and “educating”. Not “giving therapy”!

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No opening up of secondary scenes. No psychologising. Staying with the core task of teaching.

As experts who are well versed, yet not mandated in therapy we must not fall victims to the enticement of entering upon psychologic speculations.

High quality in realizing our legal task, namely teaching, can, however, indeed cause therapeutic effects:

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“Good teaching” gives an external structure. This helps to compensate the often deficient internal structures of the pupils. School as a supportive frame thus offers aspects of containment.

***Pedagogy and the societal dimension***

My years of pedagogical profession began shortly after the events which are labelled “68s“. It was a time in which a lot of external structures were abolished. In retrospect, that is mostly interpreted as liberating and widening the horizon. If the “68s“ were a kind of medicine, one could say they had a curing effect. But any good medicine whatever has side effects. And those appear – as it often happens – only after some time. In my perception they become effective in the present discourse on social politics in Europe.

What was too little taken into consideration after the 68s is that the reduction of external structures requires stable internal structures of the individuals in order to have a liberating effect promoting creativity. With children, however, the structures are still developing. With those “having special behavioural problems” (that’s our topic) they often are extremely weak or not developed at all. So first of all “repair service” or basic construction work must be done.

***Too much freedom creates fear.***

If the homoeostasis, the equilibrium of internal and external, individual and collective structures begins to totter, that creates fear. That psycho-logic is reflected in the results of an opinion poll on the topic of “freedom” done in 2017. The press reported about it under the heading “Too much freedom creates fear”. And in the subtitle there was added: “Limits, clear rules are important for maintaining freedom.”

For the study a representative sample of 1044 German adults was so to say “put on the couch” for depth psychology interviews. The client was the Barclay Bank.

What seems paradox about the result is amongst others that the individual wishes clear rules and restrictions to freedom for the general public in order to claim the greatest personal freedom possible for him/herself. “They think that Germany as a whole has become too tolerant and want compulsory limits, laws and rules. Thus 77% of the Germans are for a stricter enactment of the laws.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

The quintessence of the depth psychology market researchers is that “human beings see freedom not as a common good, but as a very personal good. They differentiate clearly between the great common liberties such as freedom of choice, freedom to democracy or of the press, and their own small liberties such as free choice of one’s partner, free choice of clothing, or freedom of opinion. … Human beings are not ready to accept restrictions on the personal level. Even more: They are even ready to restrict liberties of others, if they are thus spared such restrictions themselves. … They stand (for ex.) for freedom of the press and of opinion. But if that means as a consequence having to restrict oneself personally, then they prefer (40% of those asked) the press to be censured.” (ibid.)

I think we can apply the results from the context of society at large to our everyday school world. We often hear the following sentence of the opinion poll in school classes and particularly at parent-teacher meetings: “Tolerance must not be infinite. … More than half of those asked think that too much consideration is shown for some exceptional groups.” (ibid.)

If such an impression is formed, it has probably been explained too little that exceptions are not conceded separated from the legal order. They are no expression of lack or loss of control of the authorities. The freedom of liberating Jannik from the school celebration is not taken by me in a space without laws. On the contrary! This freedom is only legitimized by the knowledge about facts about autism, it’s an inevitable consequence of a code of behaviour justified by psychiatry. As such it can be examined, too. But such contexts must be interpreted for the fellow pupils and their parents.

The results of the Barclay study should be an admonition for us not to stay with “what is well meant”. Living tolerance and freedom is much more demanding than quick lip service wants to make us believe. They remain valueless, if they do not come together with responsibility. And that’s arduous!

If you, at the first meeting concerned with care for the pupils at the beginning of a school year, as class teacher stand up for taking up fellow pupils with physical or sense handicaps, a child with the experience of an accident or abuse, children who have lost their home country or their parents in the learners’ group, you will earn agreement. Most of all present themselves as willing, tolerant, and ready to help. And you may assume that they honestly mean it.

The answer to your plea could, however, be quite different already some weeks later. For example,

- if the philosophy lesson in an upper school class cannot be held repeatedly, because a youngster with borderline disturbance seizes every topic and runs off into endless monologues or vile defamation of others.

- if the biology lesson in class 6 repeatedly explodes, because the child with abuse experience defends himself in his proper manner, by permanently shouting in oversexualised vulgar terms, against the sex education which provokes associations in him that overwhelm him.

- if in class 3 repeatedly no team ball game can be realized because the boy with Asperger autism breaks out into panicky attacks of crying at every touch of the ball.

- if every rise of tension during the performance of the theatre group is destroyed by laughter, because the 15-year-old with Tourette syndrome shouts loud obscene expressions into the hall every few minutes.

***“Taming” and “making (oneself) familiar”***

I have consciously only taken examples from the field of psychic disturbances. And quite consciously forms of disturbances for whose coming into existence the children cannot be blamed. No human being chooses the quoted forms of disturbances voluntarily. Borderline, autism and Tourette don’t result from faulty education or a lack of discipline and good will, either. I have chosen the hard psychiatric examples to exclude any distortion, which otherwise can quickly be heard if problems are grounded on for ex. ethnic divergences.

Freedom without limits is everything else but paradise. And freedom without responsibility leads to chaos and arbitrariness. That causes fear, says the Barclay study. And if fear starts rising in a collective, soon the call for “strong leadership” is heard. So we have arrived at the present European set of mind.

Last month the annual philosophical festival “Philcologne” took place in Cologne. At one of these events the philosopher Robert Habeck spoke as a guest. To most of you he will rather be known as the federal president of the “Bündnis Grüne” in Germany. Habeck had added to the well-known quotation from Karl Marx, that the proletarians had nothing to lose but their chains, one sentence. He had done that “in striking audacity”, as the Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger wrote on the next day.[[2]](#footnote-2) Habeck said: “Today we are missing the freedom to let ourselves be chained again.” “Loud applause” the report remarked in this place. And that Habeck had added as an explanation, and there he probably had also shown himself in the role of environment minister of Schleswig-Holstein: “Missing rules don’t mean freedom. The latter on the contrary would need more capability of binding oneself, which we have lost in the course of individualisation.”

The metaphor “being chained” reminds me of the desire of primary school pupils of playing “school as it once was” every now and then. By that they mean sequences of teaching like in a “school museum”: A strict teacher in frontal teaching gives orders such as “Show your finger nails!”, “Take out you copybooks!”, “Recite the poem!” or “We say the multiplication tables together!” Such desires for discipline occasionally arise in contemporary school classes after very unquiet phases, when a group gets weary of their own lack of order. If they realize that if they are only “at the long line” collective processes of learning, but also game activities together are not possible.

Primary school children don’t know the concept of dialectic. But they have a feeling that a cultural process of disciplining is necessary to be able to deal with freedom in a constructive manner. So that game activities are possible, too. The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry could become a worldwide parable of living together - perhaps because of its scenes that seem to be dialectic. First of all the prince’s meeting with the fox. When the prince asks the fox to play with him, he answers: “Je ne puis pas jouer avec toi (…) Je ne suis pas apprivoisé.” “I cannot play with you (…) I have not been tamed yet!” There follows the fox’s demand to the little prince: “… tame me!” The translator of the new German edition of The Little Prince, Marion Herbert, comments on that in a report on her work in the Rezensionszeitschrift zur Literaturübersetzung (2016): “The German word *zähmen* has, however, a much more restricted spectrum of meaning than *apprivoiser,* the Duden explains it by “make (an animal) tame, take away its wildness”, the aspect of familiarising is missing. … As a translator I must make a decision, for in German I miss a word that comprises both aspects *zähmen* and *vertraut machen* and goes with animals and human beings equally.” Finally she makes the fox say what he means by “tame”: “It means “familiarise (oneself) with”.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

The antipodes of law and freedom cannot be combined more fittingly than in the unity of meaning of “taming” and “familiarising (oneself) with”. You cannot describe in a better poetical manner what constitutes pedagogical responsibility. And you cannot find a better and more effective access to “children with special behavioural problems” than by “taming” and “familiarising (yourself with)” them.

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Translated from German by **Wolfgang Rank**

1. Barclaycard Freiheitsstudie, Pressemitteilung. www.presseportal.de/nr/14527 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. KSt-A, 7.6.2018, p. 20 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Published on 21 September, 2016, under: Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Französisch, Marion Herbert, Neuübersetzung, Übers Übersetzen, Werkstattbericht, [*www.relue-online.de/*](http://www.relue-online.de/)*;* last visited 7/6/2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)