

Abstract:

Attunement and Teaching

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The significance of attunement in human interaction has been explored in a philosophical context in the works of a number of 20th century philosophers including M. Heidegger, M. Buber, M. Boss, M.M. Ponty and D.M. Levin. In studies of child development, psychologists such as V. Frankl, D. Stern, S. Engel and C. Trevarthen have concluded that the attunement of the caretaker to the child provides the essential and necessary basis for the healthy development of a child's sense of self. Recent empirical research also provides evidence that the attunement process begins directly at birth and can have lifelong consequences. This paper will first briefly elucidate some of the core points which have been discussed in these works. In considering the significance of attunement in teaching, the nature and specific qualities of perception will be viewed as decisive educational factors. The teacher's perception/s of her pupils, the way/s in which they are viewed and listened to, are seen as fundamentally shaping the entire learning process. Such perceptual processes will often prove to be far more decisive than the actual content of lessons. Considered from this perspective, a teacher's perceptions and views of her pupils can by no means be seen as belonging solely or primarily to her private realm; both implicitly and explicitly, they invariably become an essential part of her teaching and her pupils' learning.

Thus it will be argued that the development of perceptual faculties as the basis for realizing attunement in education must be seen as a vital task in both pre-service and in-service teacher education. This has widespread ramifications both with respect to providing a comprehensive basis of understanding of the child and human being (Menschenkunde), as well as in terms of offering impulses for concrete and daily practice in this regard. The role of contemplative inquiry in teacher education will be considered in this context. Finally, a teacher's attunement to her pupils will also be viewed as intrinsic to the entire concept of teaching as an art which Rudolf Steiner developed for the Waldorf Schools and which has also been elucidated by leading Anglo-American educators such as J. Dewey, E. Eisner and S. Sarason and P. Palmer.