

Abstract:

Jenseits des Anthropozentrismus: Lernen in Mensch-Tier Beziehungen

Univ. Ass. Dr. Reingard Spannring,
Institut für Erziehungswissenschaften der Universität Innsbruck

This contribution starts from the ecological and animal rights concern how Western education has contributed to the environmental crisis and the exploitation and abuse of non-human animals. Educational theory must be conscious of its own picture of humankind which is culturally and historically specific and has often been used in a normative and legitimizing function, frequently accompanied with violence. In the past the picture of humankind was often constructed through a differentiation of man and beast, which at the same time served to legitimize a higher status of man.

Critical anthropology has already given up universalist statements about the human as well as the reductions implicit in human-animal comparisons (Wulf, 1994). This view is supported by modern cognitive ethology that demonstrates that animals are not as mindless, timeless and instinctual as they used to be seen in Western culture thereby moving animals closer to humans (e.g. Allen & Bekoff, 1997; Dawkins, 1993). A strict demarcation is not only problematic for its hegemonial tendencies that allow non-human animals to be exploited and abused. It is also inappropriate for education since it leads to a neglect of essential parts of the human (Brenner, 2008). Many critical theorists such as Freire, Illich or Fromm have analyzed relationships that foster oppressive structures and cultural practices. However, they have also pointed to counter-hegemonial types of relationships. Similarly, this paper proposes human-animal relationships as pedagogic space that can either be used to reinforce the exploitation and abuse of animals or as a potential for personal and social transformation calling into question the priority of rationalism, productivism and autonomy as well as the (Western) view of a "good life" and the human role on this Earth. It is based on the premise that non-human subjective others are capable of creating an intersubjective space in which objects of attention, intention, meanings and emotions are shared with their human partners (Irvine, 2004) and critically applies Martin Buber's distinction between I-It and I-Thou to human-animal relationships. The paper explores how human-animal relationships can provide moments and processes of integral learning (e.g. Girg, 2007) by touching on the bodily, emotional and spiritual dimensions thereby developing whole persons-in-relationship in a more-than-human-world and discusses its implications for inter-human teaching/learning relationships and teacher training.