

The Role of Friendship and Partnership in an Education for Life

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ABSTRACT. *Partnership as a term in education is used in various ways. Partnerships exist between teachers and students, teachers and parents, teachers and colleagues, schools and communities, as well as between educational institutions, governments and society as a whole. Drawing on Schmid's philosophical concept of the art of living, this article explores the notions of partnership and friendship in relation to the other, society, humanity and our environment on a global scale. The aim is to explore the meaning and role of these terms and concepts in the context of an education for life. The education for life concept, as understood in this article, is based on Schmid's art of living concept and revisits the idea of personal development and well-being instead of focusing solely on economical advancement.*

Keywords: partnership, friendship, art of living, education for life, ecology, Wilhelm Schmid

Introduction

The term 'partnership' is used widely in educational settings to describe a range of relationships on an individual, a community and on a global level. Some of the forms of partnership of the first kind that can be found in daily practice in schools and other educational institutions are the relationships between the teacher and the student, the teacher and the parents, as well as the teacher and his or her colleagues. On a society level, each educational institution, such as an early childhood centre, a school or a university, is connected with the local community, as well as with the state or national government through policies, governance and through its function to educate democratic citizens (Dewey, 1916/2001). The partnership between schools, teachers and students on a global level, in an education for life context, is based on the notion of responsibility – especially responsibility in relation to the environment.

The education for life concept, as has been discussed elsewhere (Teschers, 2013b), revisits the idea of personal development and well-being instead of economical advancement and is based on Schmid's (2000a) philosophical concept of the art of living. An education for life aims towards enabling students to develop their own art of living and live the best life possible according to their own judgement and under the circumstances they are living in (Teschers, 2013a). To develop one's own art of living means, according to Schmid (2000a), to take responsibility for one's own life and to try to make it a beautiful one. Schmid uses the term 'beautiful' life instead of 'good' life to emphasise the individual perspective of taste in the context of art. To shape one's own life means to become an artist and to make one's life a work of art. Similar to a painting, which might be beautiful and attractive in the eye of one person but quite the opposite in the eye of another, the beauty of one's own life can only be judged by the person living this life; outside perspectives of other people have no value in the context of the art of living.

As has been argued elsewhere (Teschers, 2010), Schmid's notion of the art of living is an active one:

a beautiful life is nothing that is happening to someone, but it has to be pursued actively. Schmid emphasises the notion of responsibility for shaping one's own life and he acknowledges that it takes labour to care for oneself. He draws strongly on Foucault's (1984) notion of the *Care of the self*. The individual focus in Schmid's (2000a) considerations about the art of living and living a beautiful life are balanced through his acknowledgement of human beings as social animals. We are nearly always part of a social community and to live a beautiful life includes being able to be a part of one's social surroundings, but without losing one's individual autonomy. Schmid refers to Aristotle's (n.d./1996) notion of *phronesis* (prudence and practical wisdom) to develop an ethics that originates in the 'enlightened self-interest' of the individual and expands towards the other, society, our planet and humanity on a global level.

The notion of partnership in education will be explored in this article in relation to Schmid's considerations of the care of the self, practical wisdom, friendship, and his discussion of a political and an ecological art of living.

Partnerships on an Individual Level

According to Schmid (2000b), the basis for partnerships and interactions of any kind are 'gestures'. Gestures are understood here as any form of expression of the inner self: speech, noise, facial expressions, hand gestures, body language, silence, etc. One's inner self, one's core being, is expressed to others through gestures; therefore, gestures are linked to who we are and how we express ourselves. But we also shape our self and our character in the way through which we express ourselves, which relates to the hermeneutical circle of learning and becoming (Gadamer, 1975) as is fundamental to Schmid's concept of the art of living. Gestures are part of each individual's self-concept, but they are also part of the culture and society one is growing up and living in. Some gestures such as the 'victory' sign (first two fingers show a V) or the 'OK' sign (thumb and first finger form a circle) in the American/Anglo-Saxon culture have a very different and far less positive meaning in, for example, Greece, Turkey or other cultural settings. As gestures shape the interaction between individuals, they have power and are part of the power relations between individuals. A gesture can open up space, it can close down communication, it can exclude or include someone or something and it can honour or transgress personal boundaries, to name only some examples. In the context of the art of living, self-reflection and awareness combined with prudence and practical wisdom are of key importance. Each individual, if actively engaged in the art of living, needs to reflect critically on his or her own set of gestures and habits. Through this self-reflective exercise, our gestures are developed into a 'performance', a conscious, selected and coherent work of art (Schmid, 2000b, p. 332).

What follows for an education for life is the importance to make students aware of how their actions and gestures affect others. To raise the awareness of cultural context and cultural differences of certain gestures and behaviours, self-awareness and self-reflection needs to be addressed to support the development of each student's own artful 'performance.' The aspects of culture and social context also raise ethical questions that need to be addressed.

For Schmid, paying attention to one's gestures and developing a conscious performance of interaction with other people is part of the ethics of the art of living, in this case the 'ethics of gestures' (pp. 334-335). As indicated earlier, Schmid (2000a) developed an ethics model that originates not in an external authority, such as the church, religion, a divine being or the government, nor from a consensus of a group of people, like a community or society, but in each individual him or herself. As has been discussed elsewhere (Teschers, 2010), Schmid argues for Aristotle's notion of practical wisdom as the key to transcend egoism into a reflected form of enlightened self-interest which takes into account the needs and desires of the other and adds the dimension of a 'care for others' to the Foucaultian notion of the care of the self. Through practical wisdom, this caring notion expands beyond one's own self, and even beyond the immediate other towards society, humanity in general and our global living environment, our planet. But before turning to these wider areas of caring, I will discuss Schmid's

(2000b) notion of ‘friendship’ as partnership on an individual level.

Friendship, for Schmid, is the most promising form of connectedness with other human beings. It requires seeing the other not as an object or as a means but as a ‘self’ similar to one’s own ‘inner self’ (p. 347). Friendship transcends marriage and family life. Roles in partnerships and marriages can be various and it is not unheard of that one partner dominates the other, or that sometimes expectations, explicit or implicit, exist that hold a partner responsible for one’s happiness and well-being in life. Friendship, in Schmid’s reading, transcends these expectations and resembles a genuinely caring relationship where the well-being of the other has similar importance to one’s own. Friendship acknowledges the right of the other, the partner, the friend, and it becomes its own law. In this context, the Christian maxim springs to mind: ‘you shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ If ‘love’ is understood here in the meaning of *caritas* (fraternal love or caring) and ‘neighbour’ is seen not literal but in the meaning of ‘the one next to you’, ‘the other’ (as implied in the German translation of the Bible text, where the word for ‘neighbour’ is translated as ‘*Nächsten*’ [the next, the closest, the other to you]) then it becomes apparent that friendship that is built on this caring notion will lead to relationships that do not need regulations other than which they impose on themselves. Friendship then becomes, as Schmid (2000b) states, a way of life, a life-style.

Drawing on the fraternal notion of caring, it needs to be pointed out that friendship, as it is described by Schmid and understood in this article, needs to be seen as detached from gender stereotypes. Cultural views of friendships as they are constructed today between male-male, male-female and female-female need to be reflected on critically. Friendship has been, and still is, constructed differently in different cultural settings. Male friendships in New Zealand, for example, seem to be constructed as ‘buddy’ relationships, focused on mutual interests around sport, going out and having a good time. Deeper levels of interaction such as discussing personal problems, relationship issues and other details of private life seem to be less common. In other cultures, such as Germany, male friendships seem to have more aspects of the later kind. Another example would be the friendship ideal as it is portrayed in classical novels, for example, by Shakespeare, Goethe, or Cicero. Friendship there is often pictured as a deep bond that lasts for life and includes the readiness to make large sacrifices for one another, even the sacrifice of one’s own life in some circumstancesⁱⁱ.

In an education for life context, friendship needs to be considered as an important topic. This is not to say that friendship is to be taught as a prescribed concept in school, but it can be the topic of critical reflection and of, for example, collaborative philosophical inquiry exercises (Millett & Tapper, 2012). The role of education is not so much to actively develop friendships between students but rather to discuss the notion of friendship based on questions, such as how is friendship constructed currently in the local culture and society?, what are the pros and cons of this understanding of friendship?, how else could friendship be constructed?, are friendships between genders possible and how are these different to same gender friendships?, how do current social role constructs of ‘male’ and ‘female’ influence the notion of friendship?, to name only a few possible examples. The aim here is to help students to understand friendship as an important and complex concept that is culturally sensitive and of significant importance for their own lives. This includes the development of an awareness of the impact one has on other human beings through one’s set of gestures. Becoming aware of one’s gestures and reflecting upon them to develop an artful, conscious performance of interaction with others that is based on respect and a care for the other is part of the development of an own art of living and an education for life.

Partnership, Friendship and Society

Beyond the individual level, friendship can also act as a link in the relationship between individuals and society (Schmid, 2000b, p. 348). According to Schmid, friendship has the power to bridge all sorts of gaps on a social or cultural level. I encountered one example of this kind of friendships while I was working in a drop-in centre for youths in Germany between 2003 and 2008. Young people from about 16 different nationalities visited the centre on a regular basis and friendships have been built,

often regardless of the country of origin. A memorable experience has been when in a discussion about cultures and nationalities two of our Kurdish youths pointed out to me that some of their best friends are of Turkish origin, but that ‘at home’ violence and hatred dominated the relationship between Kurdish and Turkish people. Another example would be a couple I met in New Zealand a few years ago, she is Jewish, he Palestinian. Again, a relationship built on friendship and love (*caritas*) bridges the gap of cultural divide.

Returning to the Foucaultian notion of friendship as a life-style, as mentioned above, Schmid (2000b) argues that friendship “creates relationships of particular intensity, without being institutionalised” and that it is a life-style or way of life that can counter “the common classifications of society” (p. 348), such as social class, occupation and level of education. This ties in with the notion of friendship as being and creating its own law, as mentioned above. Comparing Schmid’s understanding of friendship in relation to society to current dominant forms of neo-liberal and capitalist thought, Schmid’s model seems more promising to be able to address and resolve issues of social stratification than the currently more dominant concepts (see, for example, McNamee & Miller, 2004; Snook & O’Neill, 2010). Schmid argues that friendship is a choiceⁱⁱⁱ, that one can choose to be friends with someone or not. Based on this aspect of choice, Schmid argues for an ethics of friendship, which he calls ‘*hetaironomie*,’ and which recognises the other in his or her own right as a human being and understands friendship as the law maintaining each others rights. This way of life through friendship generates, according to Schmid, a “transversal network between individuals” (p. 349) and leads to a community that is able to deal with complexities and challenges of existence that go beyond the capabilities of individuals to cope with. Schmid proposes that a network of friendships can create a society that resists heteronomy structures of governance through anonymous institutional bodies as they are common today.

Schmid’s ethical concept, which is fundamental for his considerations of the ‘ethics of gestures’ above and the ‘ethics of friendship’ as in this section, is, as discussed earlier, an individual based ethics model that builds on the enlightened self-interest of each individual. Through the faculty of practical wisdom each individual needs to take into account the interests and desires of others as a care for others will lead to a social environment that is also beneficial for each individual (Teschers, 2010). Schmid calls this concept an ‘ethics of practical wisdom.’ It needs to be mentioned here that Schmid’s ethical concept needs to be discussed critically in light of the Subjectivist Objection, similar to critique that has been laid against Foucault (see, for example, Giselsson, 2012). Schmid, however, draws strongly on Aristotle’s notion of *phronesis* (practical wisdom), as indicated earlier, to reconcile Foucault’s individualistic outset with Aristotle’s virtues ethics, which potentially creates the basis for shared normative ethics (compare Nussbaum, 2011). More work is needed, however, to explore this point to its full extend.

Applied to an education for life concept, friendship needs to be addressed in relation to society, politics, globalisation and overreaching ethical questions of human interaction and responsibility. Students should become aware of the interconnectedness of human beings, especially in the globalised world we are living in today. Beyond cultural and social considerations, globalisation and today’s technological advancements also pose questions around ecology and our relationship with our planet.

Education and an Ecological Art of Living

Through the faculty of practical wisdom an individual’s ‘care of the self’ (individual art of living) develops into a ‘care for others’ (social or political art of living) and finally progresses into a ‘care for the environment’ (ecological art of living). According to Schmid (2000a), each individual shapes his or her living environment to a certain extent him or herself. Therefore, an individual’s own art of living has to take responsibility for this shaping capacity and has to reflect upon one’s actions, behaviours and habits in relation to the environment one is living in. A sustainable treatment of the environment and our resources is part of a reflected art of living (p. 408) and of a partnership with

our planet.

Schmid claims that one of the events that created or at least supported the development of the awareness for ecological questions has been the space programmes of the second half of the 20th century. To be able to see our planet from the outside perspective allowed humanity to comprehend much more clearly that Earth is a closed and finite system and that actions that impact on our planet subsequently impact on our own living environment and on the environment we leave for our children. The perception of our planet as a whole and as an interconnected system provides the ground for a care for the environment. According to Schmid, the ‘ideological question’ of the 20th century between democracy and communism receded into near oblivion towards the end of the 20th century and has been replaced by the ‘ecological question’ (p. 412) of how to save and protect our living environment. The developments of the last five to ten years, however, seem to have revived the ideological question in light of the so called ‘Arabic spring’ movement and developments in the Middle East, Russia and Eastern Europe. Still, global warming has mostly been accepted as a given development and political actions have been taken in many countries to further renewable energy and more sustainable behaviour. The question is if political decisions can be made swiftly enough to avert the worst possible outcomes of current climate shifts. Instead of top down, a bottom up approach might be more prudent, especially in the long term.

Based on the ethics of practical wisdom, as described above, Schmid constructs an ethical responsibility for the environment that evolves for each individual through practical wisdom as an ‘ecological ethics of the art of living’ (p. 414). He refers back to the notion of agency that each individual has in relation to his or her own actions and decisions, which leads to a responsibility to critically reflect upon one’s use of resources and technology for one’s own life-style. A helpful question to ask in this context is ‘where from ... where to?’ (p. 420). Where do the resources – the jeans, the coffee, the shoes, the energy – come from? Is it prudent to buy goods that have been shipped from the other side of the planet, or would practical wisdom indicate that local goods are more sustainable and better for one’s own good in the long run. Also, one ought to ask, for example, what happens with the mobile phone or the old television that might still work but that one wants to replace with a new one for more comfort. However, these questions presume, especially if applied to larger issues, that the importance of the environment for one’s own life-style and self-concept has been recognised. Schmid argues that the insight of recognising behaviour as harmful to our living environment does not necessarily have to lead to a change in action. The fundamental question that needs to be answered first is if the continuation of humanity as a race is desirable or not. If a potential slow extinction of humanity through their own actions would be seen as a feasible way to proceed, no change of course would be necessary. Schmid suggests, from an educational perspective, that it might be helpful to mount ethical arguments for the extinction of humanity to emphasise the importance of this question and to encourage a reflective engagement with this question, which hopefully will lead to productive counter arguments (p. 422). If this procedure is the most promising educationally to lead to valuing the continuity of humanity is questionable, however. As discussed elsewhere (D’Olimpio & Teschers, 2014), philosophy for children and especially the practice of community of inquiry (CoI) in educational settings might be a better tool to address questions such as the desirability of human survival as a race and subsequent consequences for sustainable behaviour today.

Schmid builds further on his concept of the ethics of practical wisdom and extends the ethical responsibility that arises from an ecological art of living. As Schmid’s ethical concept for the art of living is based on the prudent self-interest of the individual, the faculty of practical wisdom leads to the recognition that a sustainable life-style is beneficial for the existential self-interest of each individual: “act in such a way that you do not ruin the foundation of your own existence” (p. 425). Further, through recognising the importance of care for the other, Schmid concludes that an individual, who is shaping his or her life based on the art of living, has to act in a way that takes into account the impact of one’s action on others, as he or she would expect others to do so in the same way (p. 426). Schmid argues further that the concept of the care for others not only includes currently

living people, but also potential future generations and the continuation of humanity as a race. Taking into account that the Earth can exist without humans, but humanity cannot feasibly continue to exist without a suitable living environment on our planet, Schmid follows that based on an ethics of practical wisdom each individual ought to act in a way that he or she treats the found circumstances (e.g. the environment, resources, ecosystem) not just as a means to an end, but as an end in themselves (p. 428).

These considerations feed into an education for life in a way that educationists should support students in their ethical considerations and make them aware about the wider interconnections of the world we are all living in. An education for life does not list a set of rules which are to follow to live a sustainable life-style but it encourages and empowers students to reflect upon their own beliefs, behaviours and habits and to ask meaningful questions that lead to reflected values, actions and habits (Teschers, 2013a). Schmid discusses a range of topics that can be helpful to critically reflect on in educational settings to further a healthy partnership with our planet:

1. Reflect on one's own self-concept and how one relates to the people and the world around oneself;
2. develop a prudent life-style with a balanced use of resources and technology;
3. make use of the askesis techniques of the art of living (Schmid, 2000a, pp. 325-386) to raise one's self-efficacy and empowerment to resist the inviting character of new technologies and rather use them in a prudent and reflected way;
4. reflect on one's own habits and scrutinize even minute every day habits in the light of their environmental impact (e.g. using an elevator when stairs would work just as well);
5. transition from a mindless 'consumer' to an active 'operator' and reflected 'user' of technology;
6. further awareness of life- and resource-cycles, which leads to
7. the development of a sustainable life-style, which entails not to routinely follow desires, but to reflect on necessity and impact of a potential action;
8. to develop an 'ecology of the body', which means to take care of one's body through exercise, but also through awareness of which foods to use and the potential impact of, for example, genetic manipulation and pesticides;
9. to enjoy pleasure in life with an eye on the Epicurean interpretation of keeping a balance and consciously enjoy the simple pleasures (e.g. a good conversation with a friend, a stroll in the park) instead of mindlessly consuming the latest trend that is advertised; and finally,
10. to strive to develop an attitude of serene happiness in life.

Again, a promising tool to address these issues in a classroom or any other educational setting would be the CoI in the tradition of the philosophy for children approach (D'Olimpio & Teschers, 2014).

Conclusion

In an education for life context, partnership needs to be explored on three levels of complexity: individual partnerships, partnerships on a society level and partnerships in a global context. Schmid combines the self-interest of each individual with Aristotle's notion of *phronesis* to develop an ethical concept that extends levels of responsibility from the individual in concentric circles towards others, society, humanity and our eco-system on a global level. For social interaction between individuals as well as for constructing healthy societies, friendship is proposed as the most promising form of relationship and partnership. Friendship, in Schmid's understanding, builds a genuinely caring and reciprocal relationship that transcends all other relationships and does not need external laws or regulations as it becomes its own law through its caring and nurturing character. However, this stylisation of friendship requires a careful reflection on the notion and understanding of friendship.

Schmid seems to draw on an ideal image of friendship, which cannot be assumed to be the norm transculturally, although it might be desirable. If the philosophical concept of the art of living can grow this kind of friendship and partnership on all three levels will have to be explored in more detail in subsequent work. Still, the implications of Schmid's ethical model of practical wisdom for partnerships, friendships, societies and our ecology are interesting and promising, although the representation of Schmid's ethical argument is somewhat limed in this article, as the focus lies elsewhere.

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ⁱ All quotations from Schmid (2000a, 2000b) are my translations.

ⁱⁱ See, for example, the legend of Damocles in Cicero's *tusculanae disputationes*, or the role of Mercutio in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

ⁱⁱⁱ 'Choice' is understood here in a literal sense, following existentialist thought (Crowell, 2010), and should not be misread as neo-liberal terminology.