

**Buck, Günther (2019): *Lernen und Erfahrung. Epagogik.*  
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According to a widespread view in contemporary debates on didactics and psychologically inspired learning theory, two basic assumptions about the concept of learning are (tacitly) presupposed. On the one hand, learning is to be taken as a continuous and progressive process, as a *learning process* in which the students increasingly acquire additional skills and knowledge. On the other hand – and related to this – it is assumed that learning is to be understood in terms of *results* and can accordingly be seen in the form of achievements. It cannot be denied that these assumptions are in some tension with basic principles of philosophical teaching and learning. It is obvious that not only positive results of an increasing knowledge characterize philosophizing. Therefore, there should be furthermore an acknowledgment of controversy and discrepancies, a free formation of judgement in open fields of thought and opportunities for testing alternative ways of thinking as well as in-depth reflection on self-delusions. Nevertheless, the widely used assumptions are supported within the framework of the current cross-national developments in education policy by the implementation of educational standards in the curricula (e.g. as a result of the PISA studies). It is reasonable to suspect: The suggestive persuasiveness of this widespread view does not only result from the conviction of being able to diagnose learning processes in the form of outcomes, but rather from the theoretical axiom that *learning is a continuous process* towards a clearly focused aim.

But there are other concepts of learning. Günther Bucks reasoning on learning does not focus on moments of fulfilling standards but on discrepancies and the experience of failing. Buck has elaborated these central ideas in his philosophical study on *Lernen und Erfahrung. Epagogik (Learning and Experience. Epagogy)*. After an increased response to Buck's theory in pedagogy and educational philosophy in recent years (e.g. by Andrea English (2014), Norm Friesen (2017), Andreas Gelhard (2016; 2018), Käte Meyer-Drawe (2008), Sabrina Schenk/Torben Pauls (2014)), his most influential and important book is currently being published in a fourth edition (1967/1969/1989) after exactly 30 years with a new foreword by the editor Malte Brinkmann (Berlin), although unfortunately not in English. Günther Buck (1925-1983), who was a professor of pedagogy and a member of the well-known research group *Poetics and Hermeneutics (Poetik und Hermeneutik)* around thinkers like Blumenberg, Jauß and Koselleck, outlines in his text both a theory of learning from a hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective and a still instructive reflection on didactic forms of learning. The original subtitle of the study is formulated with regard to Aristotle's concept of 'Epagogy': *Towards a Concept of Didactic Induction (Zum Begriff der Didaktischen Induktion)*. It is not entirely clear why this subtitle has not been explicitly included in the new edition. Buck has evidently assigned a central role

to the systematic relationship between Epagogy in the sense of induction and didactic forms (such as the *example* in Chapter 2) in understanding the concept of learning.

The book is divided into three large chapters. In the first chapter, which bears the title of the entire study, Buck develops the categorical context of his project. He attempts on giving a focused reconstruction of the history of philosophy with reference to especially Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Husserl and Gadamer with the systematic claim to justify the complex internal structure of the experience of learning *as* learning-as-experience. Against this background, he explores the central didactic approaches and forms of his philosophy of learning. In the second chapter Buck specifies the connection between *Induction and Example (Induktion und Beispiel)*. In the third chapter, which was only added posthumously in the third edition of 1989, he examines the relationship between *Analogy and Understanding of Analogy (Analogie und Analogieverstehen)*.

Against the teleological view of a linear-additive learning process, Buck emphasizes the constitutive role of disruptive, counteracting obstacles for any kind of learning. Mainly with reference to Hegel's explanations from the *Introduction to the Phenomenology of the Spirit*, Buck clarifies that learning does not mean that the learner gains new experiences in dealing with objects *within* an existing horizon of background assumptions; but rather that he makes a second-order experience about his current criteria and conditions of experience itself (79-89). Hegel's idea of the "reversal of consciousness" ("Umkehrung des Bewusstseins") finally proves to be the central theoretical resource for Buck's anti-teleological and negativist concept of learning. He terminologically defines it as 'transformative learning', as Andrea English (2014) has translated the term "Umlernen" (11). Buck signifies that the experience of irreconcilable contradictions has an impact on the learner himself insofar as he is compelled to examine, revise and transform his thought-and-action-leading background assumptions. Of course, one should not overlook the fact that Buck is following Hegel only partially and (following Gadamer) defends the inexhaustible, unlimited openness of all learning and experience against Hegel's teleological system.

Nota bene: Buck attempts to define the concept of learning philosophically; but he does not address the peculiar claim of *philosophical learning* as required in the theory and practice of philosophy teaching. A systematic examination of Buck's theory in the didactics of philosophy is largely a desideratum. However, I would like to suggest at least some of the potential starting points for a didactical reflection. On the one hand, it can be said that Buck's theory could contribute to an expanded understanding of the traditional principles of *Subject- and Student-Orientation* in the context of philosophical learning and teaching. His sophisticated analysis on the fore-structures of learning (following especially Aristotle and Husserl) opens up an instructive theoretical approach in a twofold sense: First, he presents plausible reasons for the assumption that *conceptual* learning should be based on background and pre-knowledge (see e.g. Christian Thein (2017)). With convincing arguments he, secondly, confirms the didactical claim that the confrontation with philosophical problems enables the learner to dismantle ethically significant self-delusions along this background and pre-knowledge.

On the other hand, one can say that Buck's multifaceted analysis highlights the special status and function of the didactic form of the *example* (chapter 2). With a view to philosophical

learning and teaching (at least in the German-speaking debate), this form has been examined only rarely in recent years. It may be assumed that both in the training of (prospective) teachers and with regard to the practical organisation of teaching and school lessons, the 'classical' models of general didactics about *Examples*, *Exemplarity* or *Exemplary Learning* (e.g. by Wolfgang Klafki, Martin Wagenschein) seem to be still quite common. Of course, Buck does not only point out the didactical and philosophical inadequacies of these models (131-133); he also presents a differentiated analysis of *examples* with a view to their opening function for abstract and conceptual learning. For the theory and practice of the teaching of philosophy, the part of the study in which Buck decisively demonstrates the relevance of examples for the learning of *philosophical concepts* seems almost to be indispensable (167-172). Furthermore, the higher-order level of Buck's theory also results from the fact that he does not justify the deep reflection on the phenomenon of learning against the scope of teaching. Among other things, Buck's decidedly didactic analyses on *examples* and *analogies* provide substantive objections against the tendency to undermine the validity and motives of teaching and teachers; a virulent problem that has been aptly problematized in current discourse as 'learnification' (Gert J. J. Biesta).

So: With regard to the teaching and learning of philosophy, Buck offers a variety of starting points. He provides a corrective against the reductionist tendencies to narrow the concept of learning down to standardised objectives and one-sided results. Through his negative concept of learning, he also suggests the close connection between the experience of contradictions and the advocacy of alternative ways of thinking with a view to the formation of philosophical judgements.

## References

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