

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH NETWORK (FWO-WOG)
“PUBLIC PEDAGOGY AND SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES”
SYMPOSIUM 10-12 JANUARY 2018 – GHENT - BELGIUM

FOCUS

*This network brings together researchers with an interest in the public role of education in the face of sustainability challenges. One of the network's aims is to develop a theory of public pedagogy with a focus on sustainability issues and to engage in joint research. During the [kick-off symposium](#) in March 2017, we took time to get to know and discuss each other's work. We also talked about how we wanted to organise this network in the future. Following the outcomes of this discussion, this second meeting will focus more systematically on **further conceptualising our understanding of public pedagogy**, thereby taking the **specificity of sustainability issues** seriously. In order to do so, we will draw inspiration from texts, invited lectures, concrete cases, an excursion, etc. and engage in further in-depth discussion to take a next step towards a theory of public pedagogy and sustainability issues. Throughout the meeting, we will take time to jointly identify and describe **key concepts** on public pedagogy and sustainability issues and, in doing so, develop a glossary that provides us with a shared vocabulary on the network's topic. Furthermore, we will identify and elaborate **essential research challenges** (theoretical – methodological – empirical). This should provide us with a solid basis for further interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration.*

PARTICIPANTS

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WEDNESDAY JANUARY 10TH 2018

'Public pedagogy: An exploration of literature' (guest lecture by Iréne De Koning)

After a general welcome and [introduction](#) by Katrien Van Poeck, the meeting officially starts with a [presentation](#) by Iréne De Koning on her master thesis on public pedagogy and how in this literature the public as a concept finds a place. Her presentation is built around the work of Giroux with whom she puts four other authors in dialogue: Sandlin, Savage, Jagodzinsky and Biesta. She highlights the paradox in Giroux' work between steering and emancipation and discusses how Sandlin, Savage, Jagodzinsky and Biesta's work on public pedagogy shed another light on that. She also presents four interesting practices which make the different approaches more tangible: film, culture jamming, out of the box dolls & take the line for a walk.

Discussion



After the coffee break the presentation is followed by an extensive discussion on public pedagogy in which the presentation of Iréne is used as a starting point. The discussion focuses on a series of interlinked topics. First, we discuss public pedagogy as a concept. In talking about public pedagogy, for example, we always seem to focus on the intellectual aspect, thereby neglecting aspects of emotion, body, sense etc. and also seem to focus on

the outcome instead of the process. Furthermore, there is an important difference between the Anglo-Saxon and the Continental interpretation of the term which also became clear in the presentation by Iréne. The understanding of 'public pedagogy as a verb' presented by Iréne is well received by some participants because it is a processual approach and can help us understand notions of inclusion and exclusion if we speak about processes. Others state that it might be more important to focus on which verbs constitute the public, because the public as a verb might lead us into a lot of conceptual vagueness. What does it mean? If the public is an effect of a verb, which activities and processes, then, constitute the public?

Second, the notion of the public is addressed: Is it inherently good? What constitutes the public? Is it only the sum of humans or is it something more/something else? Should we talk/think about plural publics? And how does it relate to the distinction between the people and the population? Furthermore, the question arises what it means for something to be public? It is more than just presenting something as accessible. And what do we find on the other side of the spectrum? Is it for example the private? Here, Noortje Marres' work on how a public is always caught up in an issue and her distinction between 'privatisation' and 'publication' might be relevant to further develop Savage's idea of the 'concrete public' – especially in relation to sustainability challenges. The public can also be understood as something that gets constituted temporarily and that transforms – as historical momentums in flux.

Third, we also focus on the notion of pedagogy. When is public pedagogy 'pedagogy' and not – for instance, communication? Is there a form of pedagogy which isn't public? The comment is made that

in all we say, the pedagogical seems to slide away. This seems also the case in the text of Sandlin. And Giroux, it is argued, does not have a theory of education but seems to rely on a taken for granted notion of learning in relation to the making of the public.

Finally, it is suggested to also focus on what is going on, to investigate what happens in practices that claim to be a case of public pedagogy. This might help us to clarify these concepts more than just focussing on the concepts themselves. These are, after all, very difficult to grasp disconnected from a specific historical context and setting. In so doing, it seems important to pay attention to moments of disruption, to struggle, to questioning the routine ways of doing, to engagement and artistic ways of self-expression (in a Deweyan sense – expression of an emerging self) where becoming someone and making something are not disconnected from each other.

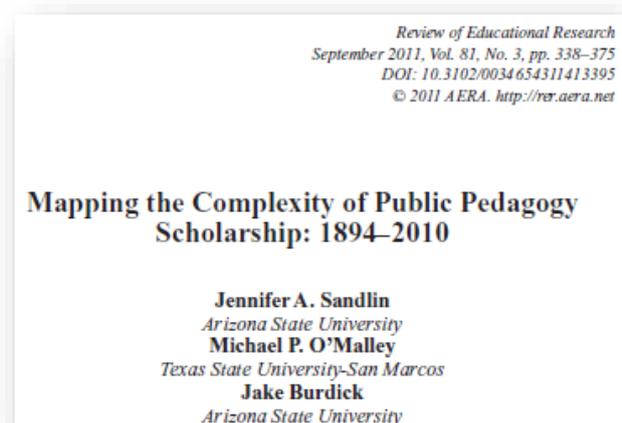
Reading seminar: 'Mapping the complexity of public pedagogy scholarship: 1894-2010'

After an invigorating lunch, and a short introduction by Maarten we start with a discussion of the [overview article on public pedagogy of Sandlin et al.](#) The discussion is a continuation of the presentation in the morning and soon leads us away from the concrete text into the conceptual wasteland which is public pedagogy scholarship. Some state that the attempt to fixate these concepts is the wrong path to take but others claim that it is important to make clear what you talk about and how you use it. The parallel with sustainable development is made, another difficult concept with a multitude of interpretations. The main challenge remains how to relate public to pedagogy and to sustainability issues. Some argue that it is important not to separate content and process.

As to the latter, issues such as commitment and normativity in relation to sustainability issues are discussed. How to deal with the profound effects of sustainability issues (e.g. the fact that Kaapstad will soon run out of drinking water) in public pedagogy? How to deal with the normativity involved? How can education facilitate change without determining what this change should look like? And is any change defensible in the context of sustainability issues? Should public pedagogy educate people to be normative? Or to be political? Or should we firmly resist the promise underlying dominant discourses on education that it can/should solve problems? And is it even possible not to be normative (cf. politics of science)? It is argued that sustainability issues are good examples of issues of which one can say that 'we are all in this together'. The public, then becomes a multi-layered construct composed of many human and non-human elements and always specific in particular places.

Another topic of discussion is the need for empirical research in view of further clarifying the key concepts in focus. Some warn about the risk of falling into 'What works?' approaches and quasi-experimental designs of empirical studies. Others, however, believe that the questions 'whether something works' and 'how it works' or 'what work it does allow/enable' are fundamentally different ones. The latter, they argue, are very relevant to address empirically.

Sandlin and colleagues explicitly position public pedagogy outside forming schooling contexts. In this network, however, we are mainly interested in exploring the public role of pedagogy/education in both formal, non-formal and informal settings. What does it mean, for instance, to re-politicise sustainability issues in/through educational practices?



Workshops: 'Key concepts on public pedagogy and sustainability issues' & 'identifying research challenges'

After the discussion on the article in the main group, we work in four smaller groups toward the identification of key concepts on public pedagogy and sustainability issues which are important in our quest. After the coffee break, we continue in the same groups but this time we try to identify research challenges. The reports of these small groups are to be found on our digital network platform on Slack.

Presentation: 'Dark pedagogy' (by Jonas Lysgaard)

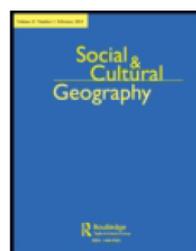


We finish this interesting day with a fascinating [presentation](#) by Jonas who talks about an ongoing book project on dark pedagogy in which he is involved. Jonas focuses on his work on denial in which he combines a series of interesting theoretical concepts from a multitude of disciplines. The presentation is well received and offers food for thought which afterwards is combined with a nice vegan meal in a local restaurant.

THURSDAY JANUARY 11TH 2018

Reading Seminar: 'Becoming public: public pedagogy, citizenship and the public sphere'

We start the day with a reading seminar on the text by Gert Biesta: [Becoming public: public pedagogy, citizenship and the public sphere](#) (2012). After a short introduction by Jonas, the discussion starts and focuses on a series of central elements of the text and of our network in general. In reference to the introductory argument of the article on the decline of the public, it is discussed that it is not clear where the author stands in relation to the decline of the public sphere and because of the abstract nature of the argument it is not clear on which notion of public he is relying either. The discussion turns towards the notion of learning and how Biesta (in his book "Beyond Learning") criticised mechanistic, individualised conceptions of learning as an economic phenomenon that is never well-defined and taken for granted as an effortless activity in which nothing is at stake. (How) we can still use this contested concept? Or should we perhaps seek to reclaim it, acknowledging that purely 'good' or 'bad' concepts never exist and that learning can have a completely different meaning than the one criticised by Dewey? In relation to sustainability issues, for instance, the appeal to learning can be seen to originate from the awareness that there are important things that we do not know (radically not know) and that therefore learning is important. This could create space for other than individualistic,



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Becoming public: public pedagogy, citizenship and the public sphere

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mechanic and economic approaches to learning. Although Biesta definitely made a point in problematizing the 'learnification' of educational discourse, some wonder what he has to offer as a constructive alternative. The discussion moves to the relation between sustainability issues and pedagogy and how the political plays a role: perhaps we have to teach people how to be normative, or focus on notions as commitment, concern and a general relation with the issue at hand. In that sense, Biesta's reference to Arendt (p. 689 of the text) might be interesting: she problematizes and rejects both pluralism-without-judgement and judgement-without-pluralism. We conclude that this discussion highlighted the importance of conceptual critique, re-conceptualisation and re-contextualisation, and inter-/transdisciplinary dialogue and research.



Introduction 'Urban Academy' (Michiel Dehaene) and presentation 'Public pedagogy as public togetherness: the city as a shared room' (Maria Mendel)

After the discussion on the article, Michiel gives an introduction to the Urban Academy which currently takes place in the chapel of the STAM city museum. The introduction is followed by an interesting and inspiring [presentation](#) by Maria on her work on public pedagogy in Poland in which she gives both theoretical input as concrete practices in which she was involved as examples. The subsequent discussion focusses on concepts as 'thirding-as-othering', appeals to ignorance (cf. the ignorant citizen) in relation to the danger of relativism, the concept of (spatial) justice, the relation between common places and the public and pedagogy, and the nature of 'interventions' and 'interruptions' (which break up things and are in that sense more aggressive yet sometimes necessary to stop something with which you cannot agree).



Excursion: 'Exploring public pedagogy and sustainability issues in Ghent) (Michiel Dehaene, Elke Duvillers, Emma Bierens)

After a nice lunch in the STAM Café, we get on the bus towards the outskirts of Ghent where we are split up into two groups for a walk in a very specific urban setting. [Group 1](#) and [group 2](#) each get a slightly different assignment to take pictures of the environment according to a specific protocol. After the walk which lasted for about two hours, a selection of [pictures](#) is presented and discussed in a local pub (see also Slack), after which the group goes back to the city centre of Ghent to enjoy dinner in a Turkish restaurant.



FRIDAY JANUARY 12TH 2018

Workshops: 'Key concepts on public pedagogy and sustainability issues' & 'identifying research challenges'

In the morning, the workshops of Wednesday are held again but this time in different groups. The goal is to use the input of the past few days to come to a deeper understanding of key concepts and research challenges. The discussions in the groups prove again to be very interesting and will be posted on Slack.

The screenshot shows a Slack interface. On the left is a sidebar with a search bar 'Jump to...', 'All Threads', and a list of channels including '# concepts-and-research' (highlighted), '# general', '# key-concepts', '# literature_publ_ped', '# network_meetings', '# random', and '# research-challenges'. Below channels is a 'Direct Messages' section with several contacts.

The main channel view shows the title '#concepts-and-research' with 2 members and 0 topics. The conversation history includes:

- David 10:04 AM**: set the channel purpose: This channel collects thoughts from the workshop Friday January 12: "Key concepts & Research challenges"
- David 10:05 AM**: We discussed a number of concepts, (1) Learning vs education
 - * With Biesta, learning has replaced the notion of education.
 - * What will be gained from recontextualizing learning in relation to urgency of the wicked sustainability issues as (learning and education) content?
 - * Does wickedness challenge learning and push learning out of the framework of purposive action?
 - * "Interdisciplinary hybridity" [Rob]
 - * Learning can be value-neutral whereas education is always normative.
- (2) Learning and sustainability
- (3) Open endedness vs a more closed up approach to learning [creating publicness - if we accept Biestas third df of public pedagogy - for whom, when, and why?] Ethical normativity of the research activities
 - * How can we, as network, deal with the normativity of education?, And, how do we relate the normativity of our research object to the normativity of our research?
 - * Does reclaiming pedagogy also mean reclaiming normativity? [Yes I would say, but a different kind of normativity, a more non-innocent normativity, a transparent, scientifically valid and stringent normativity]
 - * Do we have to teach people to be normative? Yes, but as a pedagogical action, it should be a morally and ideologically neutral value-pedagogy.
- (4) Pedagogy vs urgency of wicked sustainability issues
- (5) How to respect the strengths and build mutual strength... (edited)

At the bottom is a message input field with a plus sign, the text 'Message #concepts-and-research', and icons for mentions and emojis.

Workshop: 'Towards a glossary and research agenda on public pedagogy and sustainability issues'

After the work in the smaller groups, the discussion continues in the large group and focuses on a series of topics. We focus on the radicalness which is inherent in education and that it is important to find a grammar and vocabulary to address this radicalness and bring it to the fore. However, sustainability issues are deemed to be of a special nature, which makes it important to look for what impact this has on pedagogy dealing with these issues. For example, sustainability brings the problem that we cannot leave the discussion to the public. There is the problem that some discussions are not part of the public domain and that there is a politics that systematically makes sure that these discussions aren't held. These are important issues that have to be dealt with in this network. It is hence important to look for concepts which are mediating factors in the central relationship in this network: that between sustainability and public pedagogy. Normativity, re-politicising, activism, commitment, heterotopia, passions and dissensus are deemed to be such mediating factors which ought to be further conceptualised in this context. It is brought up that this relation is troublesome but that this does not have to be problem per se: over-clarification might be troublesome as well. We should keep it complex and stay with the troubles. It remains important however to get a clearer view on this central relationship, although it might prove to be impossible to come to consensus in this network. Both education and sustainability should not be treated as mere instruments or metaphors. Hence we have to really talk about these concepts one by one and try to understand and connect them, instead of just saying that they are important. In order to do so, it seems very important to bring content into the discussion: concrete education practices, concrete sustainability issues. That is necessary in order to create opportunities for friction and surprises.

Prospects for the future of this scientific research network

The discussion makes clear that it is interesting but challenging to work in an interdisciplinary setting on 'public pedagogy and sustainability issues'. As the group primarily combines researchers who

address sustainability issues as political issues, researchers who focus on sustainability education, and researchers from philosophy of education, it proves to be a challenge for the coming months and meetings to bridge these disciplines and gather all as equals around the central theme of the network. For example it is said that so much time has been wasted on trying to organise our discussions. Hence it is stated that there is an empirical reality to study that makes the connection between sustainability and public pedagogy: sustainability education. We can investigate in which ways sustainability comes to the fore, in which way we can identify practices of public pedagogy etc. The statement that we need to discuss *something* and put something on the table for the next meeting is generally agreed upon.

Our next meeting will take place in Dublin. Everybody looks forward to it and several suggestions are given: it is important to have a concrete link with the location without disrupting the general flow of the network. Hence it is important to focus on the city without having to start over from scratch. Furthermore, the input has to make sense in relation to the concepts that have been discussed during this meeting. Last but not least, it is important to also involve PhD students in the network.

Before the next meeting, Katrien suggest to write letters to each other as a form of communication, to keep deepen our ideas and as a foundation for the next meetings. The idea is welcomed by all, but concerning the specific process, a lot of pros and cons are given on a variety of ideas. Tomasz and Maria formulated a constructive suggestion, trying to take into account the diversity of concerns and expectations, and developed a [Dogma for our letter writing](#).