

CHAPTER 4

Workshop-*Didaktik* for Cooperation in a Contingent World

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Abstract: Based on the idea that contingency frames people's view of the world, the text examines how cooperation is still possible. It is argued that cooperation is a human constant (Tomsello), as well as a skill and craft to be unfolded again (Sennett). In order to facilitate teaching and learning processes focussing on the emergence of cooperation, a "Workshop Didactic" is developed. Such a didactic is particularly powerful in enabling people to deal with the challenges of unforeseen situations.

Keywords: *Samhandling*, interaction, didactic, education, training, learning, unforeseen

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Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate how a Workshop-*Didaktik*¹ perspective can contribute to the development of cooperation (*samhandling*). In this chapter, I mainly use the term ‘cooperation’. It is this term that is most commonly used in the field of educational science internationally, and largely covers the same meaningful content as the Norwegian word *samhandling*. Any deviations and additions to the meaning are commented on in the text. The text examines the question of how contingency, risk and unpredictability impact upon teaching and learning. A *Didaktik* model, based on Tomasello’s concept of shared intentionality and Sennett’s ideas about the worth of cooperation, is provided in this chapter. This Workshop-*Didaktik* answers the question of how people can be prepared for cooperation in a complex and changing world, which is determined by a combination of uncertainty and contingency.

Risks are estimations of possible (harmful) events that are a part of people’s knowledge. The experience of risk results in the collapse of ontological security and a sense of fundamental vulnerability (Giddens, 1990). Risk experiences are a mode of considering and mapping the social and cultural world. The benchmark for measuring this is the person’s individual conceptualization of a meaningful human existence (Bauman, 1998). However, current society’s complexity contributes to placing risks out of reach; there is no place or space for them. Furthermore, there are parties (individuals, teams, organizations, governments) that cause risk while deciding between different solutions to problems. Such risk production makes it impossible to attribute clear causes. Decisions made about actions not only contribute to a complex reality, but cause unintended and unpredictable side-effects (contingency). This is also true of the development of cooperation.

Cooperation is the ability to create with others joint intentions and joint commitments in cooperative endeavours. It is a human behaviour that is functionally integrated and the respective partners have mutually agreed upon it in several ways. Furthermore, cooperation is structured by

¹ The German term *Didaktik* characterizes various theories and research approaches about how teaching can instigate learning of content. I will explain that concept more fully presently.

the processes of partners' joint attention and mutual knowledge. Such an understanding of cooperation combines both aspects of collective work (Beyerlein & Harris, 2004:18) and (mutual) communication processes about knowledge (Torgersen & Steiro, 2009:153).

Contingency

Historically, people's courses of action have always been challenged by several possible alternatives or unforeseen circumstances. Risks (social, economic, environmental etc.) are intrinsic in postmodern society; they are unpredictable and uncontrollable since the future is unknown (Beck, 1992). Such complexity is inherent in postmodern society and causes contingency. As a key concept in postmodern societies, contingency encompasses complexity, openness, unpredictability and flexibility. On the one hand, contingency describes people's life experiences, like ambivalence of values, insecurity, risk or disorientation. On the other hand, one finds experiences like freedom, play and enablement. In other words, contingency describes man's state of being between complete determination and complete indeterminacy. However, being part of such processes means that people cannot avoid having to act. To be able to act, people have to select their actions. Significantly, people know that their actions are 'also being possible otherwise' (Luhmann, 1995:25). This 'also being possible otherwise knowledge causes people's and societies' developments to be unpredictable and uncontrollable. In short, contingency is the basic condition for cooperation and educational concepts for cooperation have to take this into consideration.

Contingency and *Didaktik*

In education, contingency phenomena (competence, skills, behaviour) are presented as ill-defined problems (Hopmann, 2003; Werler, 2015). Educational problems (defined in the present, based on knowledge from the past and assumptions about the future) appear to be ill-defined, since there are no commonly-agreed solutions, and anticipated solutions (projections of a desirable future) are a matter of opinion. Ill-defined problems are characterised by a highly-complex structure and by doubts

regarding the completeness with which a problem can be clarified. In addition, such problems cannot be solved by obvious means or methods (since it is not knowable what result ‘tools’ will give). At the very least, such problems lack components like a clear initial state, permissible operators and a likely goal state. When trying to solve ill-defined problems, one runs into difficulties specifying the initial state, which is necessary for formulating possible and adequate actions to modify the initial state and reach the goal. In brief, it is hard to find causal relationships in education.

Traditionally, ill-defined problems of education have been institutionally-framed (in schools, universities etc.) and teachers have had to find immediate, but temporarily-valid solutions. Especially in Central and Northern Europe, the ill-defined problem of education has been addressed by *Didaktik*². The fundamental aspiration of *Didaktik* is to transform the ill-defined problem of the relationship between teaching and learning into better-defined models describing how teaching generates learning of defined subject matter or skills. *Didaktik* offers a specific language for education which does not originate in other academic disciplines, like sociology or psychology (Werler & Saeverot, 2017). Such *Didaktik* systems establish ideas about how and why one should connect the teaching of collective cultural content (matter) with the creation of individual significance (meaning) (Hopmann, 2007). It is crucial for the experience of individual significance that the learner experiences some of the content as existential (Saeverot, 2013). In other words, *Didaktik* supplies teacher training with a well-founded meta-plan, which answers the question of how to impart a society’s culture to learners. Such plans bring together fundamental ideas about cultural knowledge, and the teaching and learning of this knowledge. In short, *Didaktik* models are characterised by their aspiration to reduce both cultural and social complexity and contingency. However, even the most advanced concepts of *Didaktik* are not capable of developing teaching technology that guarantees learners will learn something specific, such as particular knowledge or skills (Werler, 2015, 2017). In contrast to

2 For a more elaborate discussion of the differences between *Didaktik* and Anglo-American research on teaching and learning/curriculum research, see Gundem, 2004; Gundem & Hopmann, 1998; Hamilton, 1999; Kansanen, 1995a, 1995b; Nordkvelle, 2003. To distinguish the term *Didaktik* from the English word ‘didactic,’ it is written in German.

evidence-based teaching methods, the use of *Didaktik* approaches generates flexible and viable solutions for teaching.

A *Didaktik* for cooperation

Postmodern societies can no longer rely on generally-binding traditions, nor is there educational technology that prepares one for the unforeseeable situations of life. Today's societies are heterogeneous and, in a world that is closely interconnected due to technical possibilities, one encounters a multitude of different forms of life. To solve the inconsistencies of postmodern society, like unpredictability or risk, Sennett proposes meta-level cooperation as a sound mean to support social liabilities. At the same time, cooperation is not binding enough to require unification of the parties involved. It is more than simple functioning and demands working together on common tasks.

Sennett's description suggests that cooperation is perceived as something positive and desirable. Individuals are presented as parties who pursue a common goal in which attainment is only achievable through cooperation. Furthermore, cooperation requires trust, which often develops and stabilises as a result of experiences gained in the course of cooperation. Recent anthropological studies indicate that man is disposed towards a genetically-determined proto-pedagogy (Tomasello, 2009). However, not all cooperation is justified; cooperation is a means to an end, and not every purpose has moral or legal legitimacy.

Cooperation's anthropological basis

Tomasello makes some interesting observations. Based on his research on babies, toddlers and great apes, he argues that humans are born cooperative and helpful, and that society later corrupts them (Tomasello, 2009:3). Amongst other things, the research showed that 2-year-old children are already able to collaborate by forming shared goals and dividing labour among participants in various ways. This 'shared intentionality' is identified as a species-unique character trait (Hermann et al., 2007). 'Shared intentionality' is characterised as one's "ability to create with

others joint intentions and joint commitments in cooperative endeavours” (Tomasello, 2009: xiii). With reference to the concept of ‘collective intentionality,’ (Searle, 1995) ‘shared intentionality’ is sometimes termed ‘we intentionality’ (Tomasello et.al., 2005:680). However, ‘shared intentionality’ refers to collaborative interactions in which participants have a shared goal, demonstrate shared commitment and coordinate their actions for pursuing that shared goal (ibid).

Even if man is primed for cooperation-communicative acts (Tomasello, 2009:59), which I label as a kind of proto-pedagogy, it must be experienced by the parties involved. Such mutual communicative acts form the basic principles of cooperation. These communicative acts consist of at least three steps. Firstly, informing about issues creates coordination and the flow of communication. Secondly, sharing of valuable resources allows for the development of tolerance and trust; and thirdly, complying with social norms (fairness) or showing altruistic behaviour creates action-relieving norms or institutions. This proto-pedagogy is fundamental, as it allows for the stimulation and regulation of learning processes, resulting in the ability to read the other’s intentions. However, Sennett (2012) shows that modern society has reshaped the basic ability to cooperate through social processes like education.

Cooperation – a skill and a craft to be rediscovered again

The question of how to teach and learn cooperation arises in the tension between methodical collectivism (Comte, 1853; Durkheim, 1938) and individualism (Schumpeter, 1909; Olsen, 1965, Elster, 1982). However, people do not only cooperate to solve a given problem for gaining individual benefit, but also because they want to find a common solution. It is not only out of pure necessity that people cooperate but also for the joy of a common action.

However, Sennett’s central thesis is that modern society has weakened people’s social (and original) ability to cooperate (Sennett, 2012). He assesses the omnipresent project work as superficial and instrumental. In other words, the division of labour in postmodern society has robbed it of its social-integrative abilities. Furthermore, he finds that ignorance about cooperation has resulted in poorly-designed institutions

and technologies. The ideas behind those entities regularly assume that human beings are incapable of negotiating complexity. Poor institutional design as well as the outlined *Didaktik* development have contributed to institutions where contingency is not wanted. Essentially, this means that the potential for cooperation is incapacitated by institutional omissions.

However, Sennett argues that learning to anticipate the unforeseeable in an ever-changing world is possible through cooperation. A main condition for any form of cooperation is to learn to live and work with people who think and possibly act differently. Doing things with others and doing it better with them than without them is, according to Sennett, a necessary skill. So, the general question then arises, how can these skills be rebuilt?

At this point, Sennett argues that cooperation is not so much a matter of a certain moral attitude towards others as it is a matter of skill. Similar to Tomasello, he argues that cooperation is an embodied craft that is conveyed by social rituals (even if they are often deemed as pre-modern). In addition, cooperation is framed as a time-limited activity, which is learned and reproduced collectively. However, such activities constitute individual experiences based on emotions and reason. In the following passage, I will develop a Workshop *Didaktik* for the learning of cooperation, based on the epistemological reasoning above.

Workshop *Didaktik*

In the world at present, not everybody can be friends with everyone else – even if technological possibilities create this impression (i.e. web-based social networks). The same is true of ideologies which served, mainly in the last century (and even now) to create a violent differentiation against others. Confronted with this situation, Sennett suggests reactivating cooperation. Cooperation is not binding and does not demand unification of participants. Cooperation demands working together with a basis in common tasks. To create cooperation, Sennett suggests re-actualizing the model of the workshop, to re-build competencies, skills and institutional arrangements supporting the development of cooperation. In other words, the workshop is the place and space where cooperation based on dialogue (rather than debate) and mutuality (rather than unity) can be established and sustained.

Based on historical examples provided by Sennett, one can argue that cooperative work is based on work-rhythm, the interplay of verbal and non-verbal language interaction, bodily interaction as well as emotional interaction. In short, the foundations for skilful cooperation lie in learning to listen well and to discuss. The workshop model creates a place where people can learn from one another while they discuss problems, procedures and results.

I have argued that postmodern educational institutions and technologies are ill-designed. As individual performance tests or traditional seating plans show, the design of schools is based on the idea that learners are incapable of cooperation or dealing with social complexity. In other words, today's educational processes are characterised by efforts to eliminate contingency, in that institutional design limits people's developmental potential for cooperation. According to Sennett (2012:5), cooperation can be defined as an exchange in which the participants benefit from the encounter. However, cooperation also becomes an independent value in rituals, both sacred and secular. Any form of cooperation joins people who have separate or conflicting interests (ibid.:5). The main feature of cooperation is that it allows people to develop characteristics rather than to form them according to a defined image (model). The main target of cooperation is to create social commitment that is stable, even if people experience permanent differences. Cooperation opens up collective space for interaction to solve problems. However, the most important fact about cooperation is that it requires skill. To function well, one has to do it well. In order to do it well, people need to learn to rediscover what seems to be part of their anthropological inheritance. They can learn (again) to cooperate.

In the following section, I will elaborate on two basic conditions for Workshop *Didaktik*.

Ritual and rhythm

Following Sennett's approach (Sennett, 2012), learning for cooperation builds on two stages. First, people have to learn rituals at the workshop; second, they have to follow a certain rhythm when practicing them. Rituals are a way of structuring symbolic exchanges of information regarding the solution of problems. They establish powerful social bonds and work as tools

to balance cooperation (close to altruism) and competition (close to egoism). It should be pointed out that rituals gain intensity when repeated. Normally, one would focus on the avoidance of repetition since it is equated with routine that might dull our senses. Repetition of rituals does not only intensify their result, it also helps to improve the coordination of activities.

Rituals work as an intangible structure for people working on practical problems. They have the power to transform bodily movements, words or objects into symbols. For example, a carpenter's tool belt symbolizes their knowledge of a trade. Furthermore, it expresses their belonging to a certain group of people. In other words, rituals 'condense' meaning. In addition, rituals canalise a group's attention, helping to focus on certain actions regarding the solution of a problem. The practice of rituals at workshops includes everyone also (although this may be done in several ways).

However, rituals do not only draw on symbolic exchange and creation of meaning. Rituals become established if they are practiced and follow a certain rhythm. The rhythm of rituals directs people's skill development. Sennett points to three stages of rhythm (Sennett, 2012:200). Firstly, people have to build up habits. Secondly, to expand skill development, people have to question the established habits. Thirdly, the modified habits must be re-ingrained to improve the fluency and confidence of the skill. The following quote illustrates that:

“Faced with a new problem or challenge, the technician will ingrain a response, then think about it, then re-ingrain the product of that thinking; varied responses will follow the same path, filling the technician's quiver; in time, the technician will learn how to impress his or her individual character within a guiding type-form”.
(Sennett, 2012:201).

In other words, rituals are in many ways equivalent to choreographies, combining both physical and verbal utterances in way that can be repeated, again and again.

At the workshop

Artisans, sharing materials, as well as a variety of tools, characterise the workshop. It is a place of shared labour, for the manufacture of collective

products. Within each workshop, one will find that the people there share the worth of things (raw material, tools) through applying rituals for *critical thinking*. However, a workshop is characterised by its communicative actions. Amongst other things, artisans at the workshop traditionally criticize the journeyman's piece of work. Such critical discussion about the results of the work process will normally contain suggestions for improvement or for making the processes more efficient. Critical reasoning turns a workshop into a place 'for dialogical communication and informal association.' (Sennett, 2012:113). This is necessary to question a habit.

Obviously, when applying *dialogic conversation* to the evaluation of a piece of work, a person should refrain from insisting or arguing. A necessary consequence of this type of behaviour is that everyone must take someone else's point of view. Sennett argues (2012:211) that this forward-looking style of conversation will result in less aggressive verbal force and contribute to reducing anxiety within the space (ibid.:212) of dialogic inquiry.

However, workshops are to a large extent driven by working without thinking. The application of routines helps people to keep focus on the product. Routinised work is interrupted as soon as unknown problems occur. To solve such problems, artisans employ critical thinking and dialogic conversation to investigate the problem, and to develop different routes to solve the problem, following alternative scenarios according to the shared materials and tools at hand. Such collective questioning of a routine may lead to better routines. Interestingly, through such *collective inquiry*, non-verbal, bodily gestures can take the place of words. Furthermore, demonstration of a revised routine helps to establish trust and cooperation (ibid.:205).

Nevertheless, cooperation requires trust that develops from shared experiences. Trust functions as substitute for security and allows people to interact even when conditions are uncertain, established knowledge is at stake or it is impossible to predict the future actions of others with any degree of certainty. Trust is both a condition for, as well as a result of, cooperation. However, trust is developed only when people experience opportunities for learning and testing their trust in others (Luhmann, 1995).

The *Didaktik* of workshop learning - a model

In the following section I suggest, based on the observations above, (Tomasello, Sennett) broadening the limited concepts of cooperative learning (Gillies, 2016; Kyndt et.al., 2013). Teaching strategies such as this have been used to promote reading and writing achievements, understanding and conceptual development, problem-solving and higher-order thinking. It must be recognized that competitive and individualistic learning traditions have, according to a meta-analysis (Johnson & Johnson, 2002), positive effects on achievement and attitudes (Kyndt, et al., 2013), on the elaboration of people's speech-competencies (Gillies, 2014) and people's learning capacity (Gillies, 2016).

The *Didaktik* of collective workshop learning builds on the anthropological knowledge that people are able to engage with others in collaborative, co-operative activities with joint goals and intentions, based on shared intentionality (Tomasello et al., 2005). In order to illustrate this point, let me give you a fictive example:

In order to save a child from a burning house, a fire brigade has to communicate. This communication happens on different levels. In order to succeed in such a task, firefighters have to act as goal-directed agents. That means that they must develop some shared goal, i.e. saving the life of the child – even if they do not fully understand the situation they are entering into. In doing this, firefighters perceptually monitor the goal-directed behaviour and perceptions of the others. Furthermore, each firefighter knows that he or she can interact with the others on the basis of previously-developed (learned) and coordinated action plans (learned during basic training), which is manifested in a joint intention (to save lives). In other words, each firefighter enacts both the shared goal and action plan. Initially, such shared intentionality (based on different forms of language (speech, gesture, symbols) allows firefighters to create collaborative and cooperative behaviour.

As shown by the example of the fire brigade, to achieve a common target everyone must keep focus on what is necessary. Consequently, each person creates an opinion about his or her role-specific contribution – interdependently of the others – to achieve the common target. To coordinate one's own contribution, individuals need to

know about the possible actions of others. Such shared intentionality (Tomasello, 2010) is built up in situations where a group of people solve problems and are mutually-enabled to observe and reflect on the others' actions whilst contributing to the solution of a problem. The central idea is to build up mutual knowledge about possible actions, through group-based reflection about various (supportive or negative) actions of group members.

In relation to other models of *Didaktik* or instruction, this concept does not focus on one source of knowledge (i.e. curriculum, textbook). The core concept of workshop learning is the shared construction of knowledge (e.g. Searle, 1995). Such a rationale transforms the teacher's role; he or she is no longer the source of authoritative knowledge. The teacher's main task then becomes the creation of shared spaces for dialogic communication, characterised by teaching processes, which canalise a group's attention through collective reflection about the actions of the group. To create such *collective inquiry* about people's experiences, perspectives and competencies, several teaching tasks must be initiated:

- 1) Group members have to address a proper collaborative task that allows all members to decide autonomously about:
 - content-related perspectives (topics)
 - processes of knowledge production (e.g. division of work)
 - the tools to be used
- 2) Furthermore, both group processes and the production of mutual knowledge have to be given (temporal) space that may differ from traditional modes of time allocation. This means, above all, that there is a corresponding, extended period for the consolidation and work of the groups.
- 3) To enable group members to reflect about processes and applied knowledge/competencies, they must be allowed to construe their own contributions (participation).
- 4) Several tasks for the development of mutual trust have to be carried out. Such processes are characterised by the focus on an individual's identity formation, as well as on aspects of role making/role taking.

Unforeseen contexts

Using traditional models of *Didaktik*, it is impossible to say how the ability to co-operate in an unforeseen context (UN-Unforeseen) might be developed. This is true even if cooperation is chosen as content and/or a form of teaching, which is typically the case in collaborative or cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2002, Kyndt et al., 2013; Gillies, 2014; Gillies, 2016). Beyond that, learning cooperation is hard because it is about learning to live with people who think differently.

The suggested *Didaktik* for cooperation takes into account several conditions. Firstly, it responds positively to the fact that one can never know exactly what a learner has to ‘adapt’ to (e.g. due to the unpredictability of materials used in the workshop), because the social and cultural conditions one is prepared for through education are in the future and therefore never fully predictable. In addition, the model assumes that the environment is never fully recognisable for learners and teachers. However, a limitation of the suggested perspective is that one can never be sure whether learners have adapted themselves optimally to their environment because there is no outside observer perspective (‘God’s perspective’).

As the environment changes rapidly and unpredictably, any strictly-limited adaptation to such an environment is dysfunctional. When discussing the bowtie-model, Kvernbekk, Torgersen and Moe (2015:48–50, see also Chapter 1) point to the fact that experience of past events determines the likelihood of future events (and therefore also possible responses).

Therefore, this Workshop-*Didaktik* approach promotes cooperation through the consideration of redundancy, non-specificity and risk (see Tremel, 2002). Rituals that provide information mainly produce redundancy. Furthermore, an abundance of information is created by rhythmic repetition of rituals, for example, through the repetition of gestures or repeated discussion of solutions to similar practical problems. However, ritual and rhythm will prepare learners for being able to cope with non-specific and unknown future situations (Kvernbekk, Torgersen & Moe 2015:49–50). Redundancy, (i.e. positive information richness), is an adaptation reserved for unpredictable environmental conditions and changes – a kind of silent resource for the unknown future. Non-specificity

is a form of adaptation that is regarded as the exclusion of concrete details. It is characterised by the fact that it refrains from defined competencies and prepares learners for uncertainty. Hence, the model proposed in the chapter has the potential to generate communication about significant symbols in social actions (Mead, 1980), in order to create a framework for cooperative behaviour under unpredictable conditions.

Regarding the ill-defined problem of education, one observes that collective inquiry – building on shared intentionality – does not pay attention to it. The members of the workshop are explicitly focused on viable processes and temporarily suitable solutions. They critically negotiate both decision-making and reflection (sense-making) under conditions of insecurity. This creates a situation where the workshop members are controlling their own learning situation.

Conclusion

The presented model is based on the assumption that cooperation is (perceived as) something positive and desirable. However, not all cooperation is justified, because cooperation is a means to an end, and not every purpose has moral or legal legitimacy. One might think of cooperation within terrorist groups, the concerted bullying of colleagues in a company, or the anti-competitive concentration of cartels resulting from cooperation between companies. Such cooperation is within reach of the suggested model too.

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