The Child seen as the Same or the Other? The Significance of the Social Convention to the Pedagogical Relation

Tone Saevi & Heidi Husevaag
Norwegian Teacher Academy – School of Education Norway

Abstract
The aim of the article is to explore the lifeworld of children as they experience everyday conventional situations where proper behaviour is expected, and to understand the significance of the social convention to the pedagogical relation between adult and child. Based on interviews with adults recalling pedagogical episodes of handshaking, waiting, and thanking someone, we describe and interpret narrative examples by the light of Continental phenomenological pedagogy. Including children in the traditions of a society by exposing them to situations where conventional behaviour and adherence to social norms are expected, is an unavoidable ingredient of pedagogical practice, and a source of socially adaptive capacity and learning for children. We do not question the significance of social conventions to pedagogical practice or the inevitable importance of social conventions to human relationships in general. In order to gain insight into the apparently contradictory meaning of social conventions to pedagogical practice, we describe moments where adults expect the child to adapt to a social convention simply by being introduced to its practice for the first time. As adults we are somehow prevented from seeing the meaning of the situation for the child by the fact that we are in a different position to the situation, embedded in our grown-up-ness as well as by the conventional nature of the situation as such. We argue that the situation includes contradictory intentions and thus is a pedagogical challenge, or even stronger, a pedagogical aporia. We suggest that although social conventions of proper behaviour are desirable and important factors of socialization for the child, the social convention itself can be a pedagogical impasse that anticipates homogeneity and assimilation and thus renders pedagogic-ethical dilemmas deeply embedded in our practice with children.

Keywords
Pedagogy / Education, Phenomenology, ethics, pedagogical relation, conventional behaviour, child, time.

Introduction
Social conventions permeate our personal and professional everyday-life. Encounters between the older and the newer generation frequently include the transfer from the adult to the child or young person, of traditional conventional matters like habits, routines, norms and behaviour. The adult might plan to initiate the child to a new experience, for instance the experience of visiting a museum, a library or a church where a certain behaviour and etiquette is expected from visitors. The transfer of cultural habitual standards however, most of all belongs to our taken for granted everyday-life and is likely to go with a certain unreflectively or even automatic or repeated pedagogical practice. The unspoken, involuntary and customary nature of social conventions, and in particular when the child is exposed for

1 An insoluble contradiction or paradox in a text’s or situation’s meanings.

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the very first time to its specific expectations, is in a profound way embedded in our habitual ways of living.

A social convention appears for the first time to the child when he or she is experientially exposed to it in a socially conventional situation, and in this moment the adult, also due to the nature of the social convention, is entrenched in the very action and prevented from being reflectively aware of what the experience might be like for the child. This is so, not necessarily because the adult is indifferent, or pays less attention than required, but because the situation means something else to the adult than to the child, e.g. to the adult the situation over time has become familiar, habitual and conventional. The adult is, by the very nature of the situation, pedagogically inattentive to, or one might say, unable to hear the experiential meaning of the situation for the child. This oblivious hard of hearing of the significance of the moment, means that the adult is ignorant of how the child experiences self, others and the world in the moment while exposed to the social convention that he or she is expected to adapt to.

The adults’ lapse or forgetfulness of what is at stake for the child while being exposed to the meaning of a social convention for the first time, might be understood by the light of an allegory unfolding a certain conventionally formed deafness, as described in Lize Stilma’s prose poem, ‘Lydia’, from the book Portraits (1985, p. 39). Here is told the story of a mother who has been deprived of her only child by the authorities, and every evening, with broken heart, at twilight she sits on the porch calling out her child’s name. Her neighbours have long since ceased to listen but still Lydia’s voice drifts every night into their homes along with the gentle breeze,

No one heard the despair in her voice any longer.
No one felt pity any more.
Lydia had been crying her evening cries for so many years!
It had become as insignificant as the yapping of a farmyard dog.

Children and strangers would sometimes ask the meaning of her calling.
The tale was told with words long drained of empathy.
They would explain that crazy Lydia had a baby, many years ago.
Just imagine, Lydia a baby!

The city people hear the moan of the poor woman every evening, but they take no notice of their hearing. They no longer discern the real meaning of what they hear, and thus have somehow experientially become inattentive to their original empathic sense of the incident. This negligent forgetfulness that covers our senses as well as our consciousness when an experience has become habitual might lead to a certain unseeing seeing and an inodorously smelling as well as a deaf hearing. The people in Lydia’s neighbourhood hear the echo of her voice, but they do not take in the meaning of it. “The echo of meaning has become meaningless, useless, a shade of noise not reverberating in the hearts of the listeners,” (Saevi 2005, p. 186). They have become so accustomed to Lydia’s desolate grief that they unknowingly protect themselves against the demand of the situation by turning a conventionally deaf ear to it.

The hearing that has lost its ability to discern and make sense of what is heard seems to have essential traits in common with a custom, a habit, that which we know as a social convention. The social convention is no longer consciously taken notice of but remains in the unreflected or pre-reflective twilight zone of action. Social conventions, like social norms and routines, protect our relationships by rendering them unheeded, smooth and easy. Løgstrup asserts that social conventions can cover up our ability to respond, because “we are usually able to conform to these directives without even having to consider the other person, much less take care of his [or her] life” (1971/1997, p. 58).

Considering our focus on the significance of the social convention for the relation between adult and child, the following questions seem to be relevant here. How do social conventions protect and also expose the child? How does the child experience adult conventions of proper behaviour and how does
the ‘conventionalized’ adult understand the child? What is the significance of social conventions in pedagogy and the reverse, how might pedagogy influence social conventions?

In this article, based on empirical descriptions of relationships between the child and the adult in ordinary everyday pedagogical situations, we reflect phenomenologically on the meaning of conventions of proper behaviour to pedagogy. Social conventions are implicit in almost everything we do and say as well as in our ways of being and acting, and are a source of socially adaptive capacity and learning for children. We do not in this paper question the significance of social conventions to pedagogical practice or the unavoidable importance of social conventions to human relationships in general. Rather, we try to explore aspects of the paradoxical pedagogical situation that we as adults by necessity are trapped in when living our everyday habitual life with children. By doing so, we touch upon an existential and experiential area of life where dilemmas of pedagogical otherness and sameness are evoked and addressed, and where the child’s sense of self is at stake.

The experiential material chosen for phenomenological reflection was drawn from these traditionally unattended areas of everyday life where our social conventions reside. Our point of departure is three “anecdotes” (van Manen 1989, 1997) shared by adults, as they recall situations from their childhoods where they encountered experientially, the meaning of a social convention as an adult tacitly approved act. The anecdotes depict the lived meaning for a child of the convention of shaking hands, of waiting for mother, and of thanking another for a meal. Our intention is to explore the pedagogical significance of the convention of proper behaviour of children through these experiential descriptions, and point to some pedagogical dilemmas evolving from the experiential moments.

The term social convention

Etymologically the term ‘convention’ stems from the Latin word convenire, meaning to unite, to be suitable, to agree, from com ‘together’ + venire ‘to come’. A convention is a common agreement of conduct, manners and ways of being and doing that over time have become incarnated in our body, senses and movements and thus have somehow come to reside to a large degree outside our intended actions. The social convention is part and parcel of our relational life thus it is by its very nature of an unreflected and unplanned quality. Phenomenologically one might say though, that the pedagogical transmission of social conventions also is intentionally expressed in gesture, mood and attitude, taking into account the wide-ranging phenomenological meaning of the term intention from the pre-reflective embodied spheres of world relation to the more cognitive and reflective renditions of the phenomenon.

One might for the purpose of an examination of the meaning of the social convention to pedagogical practice leave out all the complex historical and philosophical implications of the phenomenological term intentionality, a distracting sidestep that would lead us astray from pedagogical practice and the experience of the child. In pedagogical practice, cultural and social conventions are intertwined with our very being with children, and are presented to children directly through our embodied presence together with them. We tell our social conventions through our glance, our gestures, mood and expressions, as well as the ways in which we relate to time, space and the other.

Conventions, according to Løgstrup, have developed for various cultural and social reasons, some time in the past, within a certain tradition or sub-tradition, and are part of our belonging to a particular culture (1971/1997). Tradition thus at least partly is built up by common agreements or social conventions that the members of a particular society consent to and are familiar with – although for the most part, in a pre-reflective and non-cognitive manner. Conventions within a tradition accordingly, are habitual, customary and ritual practices rather than deliberate and calculated predetermined acts. Similarly, conventional habitual seeing that once was reflective, turns over time into a fairly

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unconscious practice that tends to envelop our reflective perception rather than allowing us to reflect on our actions. Conventional inattention, like the unrecognized deaf hearing of Lydia’s voice by those around her, was once alertly heard, but has through time become an act of custom and habit. Hence, a social convention cannot be attentive to its own existence in the moment of being rendered, or it would not be a convention. One might suggest that the social convention is before it is reflected (if reflected at all), and like being, the convention in the very moment of absorbed action, is not aware of itself (Saevi 2005, p. 169). Social conventions thus are hidden to us in the very act of being performed, and at the same time they influence our being and acting regularly and profoundly. In short, social conventions of proper behaviour are present in all pedagogical situations, and as we suggest here, aspects of the nature of the social convention might be explicitly explored in pedagogical relational practices in children’s experiences of greeting, waiting and thanking.

Social conventions belong to our way of life

Mollenhauer (1983/2003) and van Manen (1989, 1991/2006, 1997) both place an emphasis on the concrete pedagogical example in order for pedagogical research to sustain pedagogical practice. We take our point of departure in the concrete, evocative and lived experience – through descriptions where “the phenomenon is placed directly in the lifeworld so that the reader may experientially recognize it” (van Manen 1997, p. 348). Along with Augustine (354-430) and Mollenhauer (1983/2003) we understand the pedagogical relationship metaphorically as the adult’s thoughtful response to the child’s call, and the sincerely and truthfully told or written description of the actual pedagogical situation to be the very core of pedagogical practice. Mollenhauer suggests:

> If we accept the Augustinian metaphorical description of developmental preparedness [Bildsamkeit] as “call and response” then the self-reflexive relational story is the most appropriate form for the pedagogical subject to be described. The stories illuminate a theoretical thesis, that it is only possible to speak reasonably and action relevant of developmental preparedness [Bildsamkeit], when its creation is accounted for

In pedagogy, how do we account for what goes on between the adult and the child, me and the other? As Mollenhauer rightly reminds us, the pedagogical situation, and thus the pedagogical relation, is an immensely complex ‘togetherness’ that can be understood, although always insufficiently, through thoroughly reflected descriptions. But what does the description describe? Van Manen (1991/2006) points to the significance of the good example in pedagogical inquiry. He says: “Pedagogical theorizing involves the study of good examples, of the goodness of examples of pedagogical action” (p.218). What are the pedagogical qualities of human social conventions? How and what does the child “call” from within the convention? How does the adult listen, or rather, is the voice of the child ‘audible’ to the adult, who is somehow experientially ensnared in the conventional atmosphere of the situation? How do adults respond to the “call” of the child, from within the conventional condition in which they both are in different ways necessarily ensnared? Adults and children seem to experience social conventions differently, and examples of how they may experience (sense, feel, understand) lived conventions of proper behaviour in the pedagogical relation is our focus here.

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3 The Original German Text: "Wenn wir die Augustinische metaphorische Bezeichnung des Bildsamkeitsprobleme als “Ruf und Antwort” akzeptieren können, dann ist die selbstreflexive Beziehungsgeschichte die angemessene Form der Problemdarstellung. Die Geschichten erläutern eine theoretische These, nämlich dass sich über Bildsamkeit rational und handlungsrelevant nur reden last, wenn der Geschichte ihrer Hervorbringung ist ein argumentationszugängliches Factum“ (Mollenhauer 1983/2003, p. 102).
A significant part of our adult life with children is regular everyday life, where our being together is characterized by routines and social conventions rather than deliberate actions and decisions. Mollenhauer’s term ‘way of life’ (1983/2003) describes well this habitual way of living that adults by inevitability share with children. He writes:

To the degree that we live with children, we have to – anything else is impossible – live our life together with them. We cannot extinguish ourselves as social beings; we cannot take up a dead or neutral position. […] This may indeed be a triviality, but still it is the primary and most profound pedagogical fact of the case⁴ (p. 20).

The basic pedagogical condition in presenting a way of life for children is simply by living with them, which involves a multitude of important pedagogical and ethical concerns, and strongly touches upon the question of adult authenticicity in concrete situations. In fact, the very informal nature of the presentation of a way of life challenges the idea of authenticity as a pedagogical quality, as the adult’s pre-reflective understanding of him of herself and the personal and relational lifeworld, is directly presented to the child and thus predominantly unreflected to the adult (and also to the child).

We intend though, to dwell with only a few relevant questions for the purposes of this paper, and we intend to do so by presenting some lived experience descriptions from the interview material of this study.

Conventions of proper behaviour invisibles the child

Anne recounts the first time she, as a four year old child, accompanied her grandmother to her work place.

Standing in the hallway after having left the elevator, grandmother tells me that behind this big, brown door she and two other women work at their office desks. She takes me by the hand and opens the door. “Hello, here come Anne and I”, she says smilingly as she pulls me closer to her. Then all of a sudden she lets go of my hand and pushes me firmly in front of her toward one of the women who has gotten up to meet us (with her hand extended), saying to me, “Greet nicely now.” I don’t move and I say nothing. Then I slip behind my grandmother’s legs.

This well-known situation of a child hiding behind an adult’s legs when exposed to a stranger or to an unfamiliar condition is recognizable to most of us. In this situation the safe hand of grandmother has been withdrawn from Anne. The child did not by herself let go of her grandmother’s hand to greet the stranger. Rather, she seeks cover behind her grandmother’s legs; the only safe place in this uncomfortable moment. But how is it that children hide behind the body of the adult in situations like these? The child might run away for example or lay down on the floor. The child might scream or cry rather than, as Anne did, remain silent and quiet. What is the child’s experience of this particular moment when the adult, who acts rather unfaithfully, still seems to be the one the child seeks shelter with? Or we might ask, what makes the child remain in the situation and not simply shatter it by running away or screaming and crying? The child somehow seems bounded by invisible bonds. Anne perhaps somehow senses the bonds of expectation from the two women; one behind whose legs she is

⁴ The Original German Text: “Sofern wir mit Kindern leben, müssen wir – es geht gar nicht anders – mit ihnen unser Leben führen; wir können uns als gesellschaftliche Existenzen nicht auslöschen, können uns nicht tot oder neutral stellen. Das ist zwar eine Trivialität, aber die gleichsam erste und ernsteste pädagogische Tatsache” (Mollenhauer 1983/2003, p. 20).
hiding herself, and the other standing in front of her with her hand expectantly extended. One might say that the expectation the child senses is the unreflected bonds of a social convention, which the grandmother unreflectedly imposes upon her.

When van den Berg (1970) describes a situation of a child who is asked to shake hands with an adult and trustfully gives its little hand and unconditionally leaves it up to the adult to take responsibility for it, this situation is different from the situation described above, but they have at least one trait in common: the child’s response to the handshaking experience is different from what the adult anticipated. Anne responds with a certain fearfulness to the demand of the situation, while the child in van den Berg’s description reacts with passivity and a certain obedience.

How might we interpret the two children’s responses in terms of the experience of conventional time? Is there a connection between the cultural habit of social greeting and the way that the child and the adult seem to sense time differently? The anecdote describes a joint moment, a shared present where the social convention of handshaking is supposed to take place. The child however, does not take part in the cultural meaning of the moment. Rather than sharing the meaning of the moment with the surrounding adults, the child has not yet crossed the border to the handshaking convention, but is somehow held hostage at this cultural border. Meeting and parting, the temporality of our greeting rituals like the handshake, presuppose a shared present to which the child is not yet initiated, or she is in the moment of crossing the border; fixed in the very move. Wittgenstein’s expression of the subject that in a certain meaning does not yet “belong to the world, but is a border to the world” (1963, p.116, 5.632) might add connotative meaning to Anne’s experience and to van den Berg’s description of the child’s tameness and obedience.

Somehow the conventional situation of shaking hands between adult and child seems to exclude the child as a real partner of action. The world of the child seems not yet to include social conventions like shaking hands. But what is more, in the world of the child, which is a world of unreservedness, the child cannot trust partially, but simply trusts or distrusts (Løgstrup 1971/1997). The child, who leaves it up to the adult to take care of his or her little hand, or as in the case of Anne’s wordless withdrawal from shaking hands with the unknown woman, somehow calls to the adult to care and respond. In Old Norse the term trust from trustr is related to the help or support one receives from someone who is firm and strong (Onions 1966, p. 946). Van Manen (1991/2006) and Løgstrup (1997) shed further light on this pedagogical point whereby the adult in a certain understanding is given his or her authority by the child. One might say that the child authorizes the adult to care responsibly until the child is able to take over the responsibility. Van Manen reminds us of this sensed and almost tangible experience of the child’s authority that the adult might sometimes notice, when he says: “The adult who is oriented to the child’s vulnerability or need may experience a strange sensation – the true authority in this encounter rests in the child and not in the adult” (1991/2006, p.70). This seems to be true in moments when the adult senses that the child needs his or her help. But what if the adult is not aware of the child’s vulnerability in a situation or if he or she does not see that the child needs help somehow? This might well be the situation when the social conventions of the adult world meet the world of the child. Somehow adults’ ways and lives appear not to grant access to the child’s experiential world. Conventions of proper behaviour seem to shade or gloss the view of what the child before us needs. And we so easily forget about what it was like to be a child. We might want to be as close as possible to our children, but still, our ‘grown-up-ness’ somehow keeps us ignorant of how the child experiences the moment.

Social conventions anticipate time

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The afore mentioned Van den Berg (1970) reminds us of the fact that adults live primarily in the future and constantly occupy themselves with what should be done next. The connection between present and future in adult life is almost always possible to perceive. Van den Berg says: “[…] we [adults] are reluctant to repeat most of our actions. For action is the future realized, once done it definitely lies behind us” (p. 29). Thus, for adults, the future constantly turns into the present and a new future awaits ahead, hence repetition of actions is usually unwanted and seen as a waste of time. The adult reluctance to repeat seems like a contradiction to the social convention that truly is repeated over and over. Conscious repetition through, seems to be something else than habitual conformity and unmindful conventional behaviour. One might suggest that the everyday quality of the social convention is exactly what in the very moment of acting makes it invisible and concealed to thought.

We know that for small children repetition is something experienced quite differently. Going on a bicycle ride together, we as adults usually have an idea of where we are going, or what we are supposed to do or see. Children may simply continue biking up and down the road because they enjoy riding over and over a particular bump as they are just taken up with the experience of biking itself. Biking up and down the road is exactly what young Alex in the movie Étre et Avoir (2003) seems to take pleasure in on this bright vernal evening after school. Child-like he seems to have somehow forgotten about any planned event he might have started out with, and stays with the very experience as it is in the moment.

From Philibert Etre et Avoir 2003

Adults too might be conscious of the value of the present and try to stick to the experience of the moment. But this attitude is… yes, precisely an attitude…, or an adjustment taken on with a certain conscious purpose. As adults we might value the moment because we know that a lifestyle that focuses on the present can contribute to better physical and mental health or improve one’s life experience in general. Yet even if some adults by their lifestyle or profession live more in the moment than others, the child’s dwelling in the present seems to be existentially different. Van den Berg appears to relate the difference between the adult and the child’s way of being in the present to the quality of the present.
He says: “This [the child’s] forgetfulness is of a character quite different from any of our [adult] lapses of memory…The child lives in the moment more than the adult, in the pure present” (p.30). Where is this “pure present” where the child lives? And might we somehow discern traces of the child’s pure presence in the shared present, in the concrete situations of our common adult-child everyday life? Are we as adults somehow able to recognize the location of what we might call the genuine, true or even authentic presence of the child in the present? Where are we to look? Van den Berg and Buytendijk before him suggest that we look for the difference between the adult and the child’s living or dwelling in the moment in the persons’ experiential life world by trying to understand phenomenologically how he or she senses the direct day-to-day life with others (van den Berg 1972, p.39).

One of the commonly experienced situations of life where adults’ conventional habits come to presence, is precisely the social convention, like the habit of shaking hands, which according to van den Berg (1970, p.28) is an act symptomatic of the human relation (but stronger in some cultures than in others). The convention of the handshake seems to be one of the cultural habitués that lingers on the edge between adult and children’s life worlds, and where the child often seems to be caught at the border. The handshake as social convention heritable from one generation to the next, in our Western culture rests upon a sense of time as historical and chronological, and anticipates experientially human relationships as beginnings and endings within this sequential order of time. Accordingly we meet and greet others to begin and to end our relationship for this period of time (even if we might meet again in the future). In our way of life with children we tend to introduce hand-shaking to the child as an exemplary course of action (depending on the milieu), and we anticipate, though basically unconsciously that the child shall adapt to this cultural habit. We do not usually plan to teach children the handshaking ability. The situation simply occurs when the child, always together with an adult – the adult either as the hand-shaker or as the one prompting the child to relate to the hand-shaker – is expected in the moment to relate to the conventionally expected behaviour. Smaller children who are not yet initiated or only partly introduced to the conventional behaviour and agreed-upon social life have to learn how to behave through the example of adult practice.

**Bound by the invisible bonds of a social convention**

A grown woman remembers a decisive moment from her early childhood:

I am about four and I am standing by the gate in front of our house, waiting for my mother to get ready for our walk to the city centre. The woman in the neighbouring house comes by and stops in front of me, saying surprised: “Gee, are you still here?” She has been to the grocery shop. I vaguely remember her passing by while I was waiting for mother, but I don’t know her name and we do not usually talk. From her bag a long green leek, sticks out. I also have a bag, but it is smaller and red and white. My mother lets me bring my bag when we go to the city or to the big grocery store together. The woman leaves and I wonder if I might run a little on the huge lawn? Or perhaps not. I might fall and smudge my tights or even rip them. I have smudged my tights before. I look at the swings on the playground. Will I get dirty if I try one of the swings?

The four year old is waiting for her mother to accompany her on their regular walk together. Mother has dressed and made the child ready before herself and told her to stay tidy until she has dressed and done all the last minutes things that mothers must do before they feel they can leave the house. But time passes and mother does not come. Even if the little girl is too young to estimate time, we know that she must have waited outside the gate a rather long time because of the neighbour woman who has been to the grocery shop and back while she stands there. As a reader we sense that the child has been waiting a very long time. Perhaps too long for such a small child. But if the mother were asked, she
most likely would experience time differently. Her efforts have been focused on the future and on all the things that she as a grown up is supposed to take care of before she can finally leave the house. On the contrary, the child lives in the pure present of the moment. She is not yet reflectively dedicated to the adult idea of time, nor is she attentive to the social conventions of waiting. Still she senses the bonds of the waiting norm, and adapts to them with obedience in much the same way that the young child hiding behind her grandmother's legs did. Both somehow mutely perceive the covenant established by the social convention of the life of which they are a part. They don't run away. They are in the situation in their own way. This is of course not unusual. Rather it is common and called the socialisation of children into the adult spheres of cultural life.

Of interest here perhaps, is the pedagogical meaning of the difference between the adult and the child's worlds in terms of how the adult responds responsibility to what they cannot really know (Biesta 2006): the child's experience of the world. Mollenhauer (1983/2003) notes that we have to look for traces left behind by the child, rather than call for evidence of how the particular child experiences the world. The child is (and should be) both visible and invisible to us. The otherness of the child (like the otherness of each human being, but still somehow unlike due to the nature of childhood) is a quality of the human life condition that cannot be overcome by pedagogical control or constant surveillance. The otherness of the child, the child's lifeworld - different from the world of the adult - belongs to the pedagogical impasse understood by Løgstrup as “the united contradictions of life” (1997, p. 183). The caring and thoughtful pedagogical relationship between the adult and the child gets its intrinsic life and energy from the tension of the opposite; the utter uniqueness and inaccessibility of the child's self and lifeworld. The pedagogical impasse thus paradoxically is the pedagogical opportunity that renders possible the pedagogical relationship. However, how do we encounter the otherness of the child pedagogically when we, by necessity, are trapped in the social conventions of the grownup world?

Social conventions expect something in particular – The courteous curtsey

Etymologically the term convention connotes ‘coming together’, indicating literally the sense of physical meeting of people in one place, yet, the term also signifies the common habitual agreement of social norms within a society. A social norm or convention that belongs to a situation is more or less experientially known or sensed by the members of the current society, but usually at a pre-cognitive level. The social convention expects certain behaviors and rejects others. One may wonder however, if non-members or not-yet-members, also in a certain understanding have this sensed knowledge. Through the anecdotes provided by the adults above, their experiences as children of both greeting a stranger and waiting as expected, somehow gives the impression that children sense the structures or the meaning of social conventions through the adults' presentation and representation of them. Children seem to be sensitive to what is expected of them, even if they are not yet initiated into the actual convention of proper behavior or reflectively able to make sense of the expectation that is directed at them. What does this innate sense of social conventions for the not-yet-members of a society mean pedagogically? Is this simply the way we are taught conventional actions, socialized into a particular social community, or is there more at stake pedagogically? Do social conventions and conventional expectations mean something to the child's experience of self? What is going on in the moment that the child meets the convention of expected proper behavior?

Mollenhauer (1983/2003) notes the fact that we cannot but present our value based selection of a mediated or interpretable world to children. He says, “When we present the world to children, we do not present the world, but what we see as the world. We show them what to us seems to be worth
showing from what we see as the world” (p.77). The way we see the world and what seems to us to be worth representing to children thus is mainly functional and only partly intentional. Habitual practices and social conventions are per se related to the part of our pedagogical practice that is pre-reflective and non-conscious but nevertheless a practice that shows-through in our ways of life, and discloses particular expectations of the children we encounter. Løgstrup (1971/1997) shows us that the more precise the social norms and conventions are “the easier it is to determine whether or not a person is living in harmony with them. This in turn enables us to react in specific ways to any acts of disobedience” (p. 58). The sense of disharmony in being a foreigner and unsuccessfully trying to adjust to unfamiliar customs of courtesy is what fourteen year old Kari remembers more than 30 years after the fact:

My friend Stine and I have always lived in Norway, but her father is from England. The summer we were fourteen Stine, her father and I went together to Great Britain. We were visiting her father’s parents and some other members of his family. The first evening we were having dinner with the entire family, and everybody seemed to be enjoying themselves. We were eating and commenting on the delicious food, talking in English of course, and laughing a lot. In all this I had the strong sense that they were much more refined and well-mannered than I was used to, and this made me uncertain and tense. Their utter politeness evoked in me a disquieting feeling of not being one of them. Much of what they said went over my head, and I could not share in their jokes. I realized that I was not even familiar with the correct polite phrase by which they would express their gratitude for the lovely food. (Surprisingly fast the dinner was over and) when we were about to leave the table, I sensed that the hostess of the family, the mother, was looking at me and smiled. I took it that she expected something from me, and smiled back somewhat anxious. When we met a moment later, I stretched my right hand toward her and said (curtsying): “Thank you for the meal!” Her smiling expression turned surprised and then went blank, as she withdrew her hand discreetly. I immediately knew that something was wrong. But what? I was left without a clue.

What was at stake here for Kari? Being unfamiliar with the social conventions that the other persons around the table seemed to share, placed her in a position of seclusion. The moment she is met, not with recognition, but rather with discordant reticence, she is thrown into a state of lived isolation. The social convention that according to Løgstrup (1971/1997) is a means of protection from being psychically and privately exposed, does not protect her. This protective function of the social convention seems to become operational only when one meets the expectation of the convention. It is as Løgstrup says,

[R]egardless of how these forms originated, they facilitate our relationship with one another, making it smooth and effortless, not least they protect us against psychic exposure. Without the protection of the conventional norms, association with other people would be intolerable (p. 19-20).

But Løgstrup’s insight seems to pertain exclusively to adults or persons who are initiated into the social conventions. When we are initiated into the convention of proper behaviour and do not disobey the roles or the language that the convention demands, then the subservience to the social convention somehow protects us from personal, negative exposure. But for Kari or children like her, who are not-yet-members of the conventional community and make mistakes being that they are not yet socialized, or do not understand the language of the social convention, then the convention exposes and lays open their non-understanding to others. The child or young person, who for the first time meets conventional norms does not take advantage of their membership in the culture or the fact that the convention is social and habitual (for Kari being in a different culture also put special claims on her),

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6The Original German Text: "Wenn wir also den Kindern die "Welt zeigen", dann zeigen wir ihnen nicht die Welt, sondern das, was wir dafür halten, und das, was uns an dem, was wir für die Welt halten, Kindern zeigenswert oder zuträglich erscheint” (Mollenhauer 1983/2003, p. 77).
because of their first-time experience of this particular convention. What is more, because of the unreflected nature of the social convention, the adult’s response to the child’s call for understanding and guidance may not be attributed to the unfamiliarity of the convention of proper behaviour, but rather to other things like general disobedience, a lack of will, or sheer obstinacy.

Løgstrup shows that “we constantly live in a state of being already delivered – either through a passing mood or in terms of something which in a fundamental way affects our entire destiny. We are therefore subject to being exploited” (1971/1997, p. 57). Is this also true for children, and perhaps in particular for children in habitual and socially conventional situations where the adult is not and cannot be ready to support or shield the child if needed? To Løgstrup our exposed situation in relation to others is not a result of deliberate delivery but rather it is simply part of life, irrespective of any personal decision. The pedagogical impasse, here understood in terms of the significantly unreflected nature of the social convention, the difference between the adult and the child’s sense of time, and a certain basic incongruity between the adult and the child’s lifeworld, opens up to questions regarding the meaning of and the limits to the pedagogical relationship between adult and child. The phenomenological pedagogical experience of human otherness and uniqueness, seen by the light of the social convention introduced for the first time to children and young persons, create dilemmas that cannot be overcome by pedagogical attention, care and reflection.

Social conventions anticipate homogeneity

The pedagogical situation where a specific conventional behavior is anticipated can be understood as a call for sameness, conformity and the ruling order of things. Thus, the intention of asking the child to conform by rendering invisible his or her uniqueness in favor of similarity, can be seen as the objective of the socially conventional adult. Lippitz (1990) compares the indirect traditional conforming pedagogical relation to the direct face to face relation described by Levinas, and concludes that “the establishment of a pedagogical responsibility ensues from the internal pedagogical dimension of the ethical relation” (p. 59) (the author’s italics). One may argue though, for an even closer relationship between pedagogy and ethics, and for the personal, responsible, reliable pedagogical relation as a relation sui generis (Spiecker 1984), a relation that is ethical to the core. According to Continental philosophy, ethics is not primarily a form of thinking or logical reasoning, but a particular practice/praxis directed toward the other (Heidegger 1926/1962; Levinas 1998, 2002, Dunne 2001). The pedagogic intention for practice with children is within this tradition understood as a profoundly ethical praxis; a thoughtful concern for the child’s unique person and for the uniqueness of the situation (Nohl 1970; Langeveld 1975, 1983; Mollenhauer 1983/2003; Bollnow 1968/1989, van Manen 1991/2006, 2002). Thus, one might suggest that pedagogic practice is pedagogical and ethical at the same time. If the relation between the adult and the child should be interpreted as a pedagogical relation, emphasizing pedagogical, the pedagogical and the ethical are not only intertwined, but have never been separate (Saevi 2007, p. 126). Heidegger reflects the unity between ethics and action when he demonstrates that selfhood and the relation to the other are ways of existing rather than psychological entities that we can define in terms of their presence. He argues along with Kierkegaard for the active existential and personal choice in order not to be trapped in inauthenticity and “carried along with the nobody” (1926/1962, p. 312). Heidegger seems to see the inauthentic condition of the human being as being lost in the ‘they’ (p. 313) whereby the detour to potential authenticity has to be revealed in order for the person to re-find authenticity. The claim on the person to choose authenticity, Heidegger calls “resoluteness” (p. 344), and when this resoluteness is authentic it shows itself in a caring way of being in the world with others. “Resoluteness brings the Self right into its concernful Being-alongside what is

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7 Dunne describes praxis as such: although Aristotle introduces praxis as a kind of activity whose end is not outside it, it is noticeable that he does not entirely set aside the telic mold; praxis, we are to understand, is its own end“ (Dunne 2001, p 262). (telic – from Gr. telos end, goal, result).
ready-to-hand, and pushes it into solicitous Being with Others” (p. 344). For the person to (temporarily) retrieve his or her authentic being, the person, according to Heidegger, should orient him or herself to consideration and care for the other. The condition of willed care for and solicitous dwelling with the other constitutes a situation of direct coexistence between myself and the other. In this situation the other remains other, unique, unknown to me. This constitution of the intersubjective ethical relation is heterogeneous “for it assumes the radical separation of the interacting parties and thus acknowledges their respective uniqueness and otherness” (Lippitz 1990, p. 51). Løgstrup (1971/1997) however, points to a basic dilemma between social conventions and ethics in reference to ethical pedagogical practice. Care and concern for the other by responding directly and personally to his or her silent demand of trust, in the socially conventional situation, tends to be replaced by the unreflected concern of satisfying the social convention and the demand of the social norm. He says, “Social convention has the effect of reducing both the trust that we show and the demand that we take care of the other person’s life” (p. 19). What does this mean in terms of a socially conventional practice with children? Children cannot liberate or entirely rid themselves of the views and aims of the adult and the adult world, nor can the adult take up a neutral or value free position that does not influence the child, the relation between them, and the adult self. Thus the precondition of adult intentionality of the pedagogical relation questions, by its very existence, the meaning of socially conventional actions and procedures of socialization. Like in every educational approach, pedagogy and pedagogical practice can become means to a predetermined end, rather than being the end itself. The pedagogic intention may lose its focus on the good of the child and begin to serve other purposes, for example the purpose of a particular educational system, a political or religious belief or a socially beneficial outcome. Lippitz (2007) analyzes a range of former and recent examples of pedagogical practice or theory of practice from within the European pedagogical tradition called the Bildung tradition, which at a profound level deals with the ethical and ethical-political questions of the pedagogical relationship. Bildung, he notes, tends to start in the self-awareness of imperfection and openness to the unique child, but ends up theoretically consuming the experienced otherness and foreignness of self and other. He says,

That which is other and foreign becomes simply a means to Bildung, and carries no other purpose in itself. When the other or foreign becomes knowledge, it is always presupposed that the otherness or foreignness is not fundamentally different in comparison to the consciousness which experiences and reflexively appropriates it. It ceases to be something that is known even its foreignness, and becomes a part of reflexive consciousness. The initial difference between the self and the other, the starting point of the self and the knowledge of the other, is effectively erased. It disappears in the sameness of reflection (p. 84).

Lippitz perceives that traditional pedagogy i.e. Bildung, seems to see the otherness and foreignness of the child only as a temporary transition or passage to leave behind on the way to a generalized knowledge and a common outcome of education. Education as a project that by necessity is personal,

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8 Biesta (2006) offers a meaningful interpretation of Bildung as “an idea that emerged in Greek society and that through its adoption to Roman culture, humanism, neohumanism, and the Enlightenment, became one of the central notions of the modern Western educational tradition. Central to this tradition is the question of what constitutes an educated or cultivated human being. Generally, the answer to this question was not given in terms of discipline or socialization, that is, in terms of the adaptation to an existing external order. Bildung rather referred to the cultivation of the inner life, the cultivation of the human mind or human soul. […] An important step was taken when the acquisition of particular contents became itself recognized as a constitutive aspect of Bildung. Since then Bildung has always been understood as self-Bildung […] [P]articularly in the modern Enlightenment configuration, Bildung is closely interwoven with political questions and a particular political constellation. Bildung should be understood as a “response” to a “question” – we might even say an educational response to a political question” (pp. 100-101).
risky and profoundly dependent on trust and uncertainty (Bollnow 1969, Biesta 2006) has in Bildung, he claims, been traded for a productive and effective epistemology. Lippitz appropriately indicates that originally the uniqueness and foreignness of the child was basic to humanistic pedagogy; but “foreignness does not experience any dramatic amplification when the goal of education is taken to be the integration of the young into the continuities and traditions of adult generations” (2007, p. 88). To integrate or socialize children into the social conventions of the existing, into the covenant conformity of society, means to render them social, to expect them to mingle9 to blend in, to be assimilated rather than standing out in their unique foreignness. Education as socialization into social conventions and norms, is basically a way of adjusting the child to the ruling order, to promote homogeneity, unity, amalgamation, consumption of the child, and to make the child “understandable and treatable” (p. 90).

Lippitz asserts along with Levinas that, “A constituent part of ethics is the absolute separation between myself and the Other. Heterogeneity, not unity and reciprocity, is the characteristic of the ethical situation. In this situation I, as the only subject, am irreplaceable” (1990, p. 50). Can we in the pedagogical situation where the child is expected to perform a certain convention of proper behaviour, recognize and care for the child’s foreignness and uniqueness, especially when the child’s lack of conformity profoundly disturbs the usual conventional order? Can we somehow protect the pedagogical qualities by not making the child equal, the likes of me, and someone I already know? Or is the social convention by its very nature always aiming for adjustment toward sameness and homogeneity?

The social convention is blind to the otherness of the child

Socially conventional situations with children, like the ones described above, do not seem to be concerned with unique and irreplaceable subjects, but are rather situations of assimilation and the limitation of foreignness. Somehow the social convention to be accomplished and fulfilled has to be blind to the otherness of the child. In the social convention and by the expectation of proper conventional behaviour, we tend to see the child indirectly, aiming at cultural continuity and from a profound habitual and unreflected perspective, rather than directly and with the possibility of an open and discontinuous outcome (Bollnow 1969). We do not expect something unique or other, but rather we see the child in the continuity of what it has been so far, without the potential of something new. We are somehow conditionally blinded (and deafened) by our habitual practice and social conventions so that the child in a sense remains unconscious to our vision as a unique and unconventional child in a particular situated context. The quality of the social convention makes it something we do not actively choose; something we see without reflectively being aware of it. Thus it seems that the social convention and pedagogical care mutually exclude each other. Van Manen, though (1991/2006), reminds us that routines and habits in themselves are not necessarily pedagogically bad and points to the pedagogical meaning behind habitual practices with children. He says, “Children not only need to be stimulated by new and challenging learning experiences, but also they benefit from the trust and security created by routines and habits grounded in past reflective pedagogical decisions” (p. 120). But are not pedagogically pre-reflected habits different from cultural social conventions? A social convention, unlike a pedagogical habit, is not necessarily at some point during the course of time, reflected by the adult to be a personally useful and flexible practice beneficial to the child. A social convention rather has qualities of a certain taken for grantedness and of being unreflected and thus is often practiced by the adult in ways that might not necessarily be pedagogically good or meaningful to the unique child. Logstrup (1971/1997) notes that social norms and conventions oblige limits of certain forms of power and violence of one person toward another, and in this sense they are based on reason.

This is so even though social conventions and norms are not necessarily rationally created to help persons defend themselves, to keep up social order, or to make social life smooth and frictionless. He concludes that, “their [law, morality and convention] actual rational function does not […] account for their origin” (p.57). Even though habits, social norms and conventions once may have been conscious perceptions and reflective decisions, they might have turned into the shadow land of unawareness and non-reflectivity over the process of time.

Social conventions belong to our way of life and constitute significant and unattended aspects of the relation between adult and child. But it is always possible for social norms and conventions in regards to certain appropriate behaviors to become reflective to us and hence subject to our intended consideration and choice. We may, for example, become attentive to aspects of the lived experience of shaking hands, or the meaning of waiting for a small child, and decide to pedagogically care for the child who finds himself or herself in this, to him or her, unfamiliar situation. Our level of reflection thus can somehow turn the social convention into a non-convention, or perhaps more correctly, the aspects of the social convention that we are able to recognize and render familiar to the child, make it less the unreflected social convention it once was. However, the nature of social conventions seems to prevent us from recognizing them beforehand, and the complexity of even the most familiar pedagogical situation often seems to cover for us the lived meaning of the moment for the other, for the child. We can only wonder what is really at stake in the socially conventional situation for the child.

Mollenhauer (1983/2003) has demonstrated how the aporia of pedagogical practice fundamentally is subject to every moment of the pedagogical relationship. Although at the same time pedagogical actions and options often have alternatives, and every childhood could be potentially different, he says,

Education and formation is always a process of expansion and enrichment, but at the same time, is also a process of constriction and impoverishment of what would have been possible. Adults not only are midwives in children’s development, but also for children are powerful censors of that which is part of their formation10 (p. 10).

The relation between adult and child, in a conventional sense of the term relation, involves a more or less systematic and thorough attempt by the adult of effecting and directing the child in desirable directions by simultaneously “comparing, [and] mediating the personal relationship by general norms and standards” (Lippitz 1990, p. 49).

How then is the socially conventional action experienced in the moment of acting? How does the adult sense the child and the practice as the practice takes place? Does the grandmother who encouraged Anne to shake hands with her colleague, or the mother who instructed her daughter to wait in front of the gate for such a long time, or the adults in the company of the young girl who fell short of understanding the foreign meal custom, in fact sense what was at stake in the situation for the child? The adult might be part of the situation with the child, in a shared present, but nevertheless the meaning of the event for the child with regard to significant aspects seems to be unattainable for the adult. One might say that the child “is seen, but not noticed” by the adult (Saevi 2005, p. 186). The character of the social convention prevents the adult from taking notice of what is really going on with the child in the situation. In other words, the conventionally trained adult is not aware of what is seen in the moment of seeing (p.187). Social conventions being inevitable and unalterable, and most useful and efficient guides to social and educational life and practice, seem to lack the pedagogical qualities that serve the unique and irreplaceable child. We are as adults somehow trapped in the paradoxes of pedagogical practice. We cannot seem to avoid the pedagogical impasse of the social convention that

makes the child “old” before he or she has a chance to be young” (Lippitz 2007, p. 90). The impasse blurs trust and pedagogical thoughtful care, and assimilates the child in pre-determined conformity of social surrender. And although culturally consistent and desirable, social conventions should pedagogically remain a constant challenge. Without the possibility of stepping outside of social conventions or to permanently overcome our self-centred strive for sameness and synchronization of views and wills, our challenge as adults and pedagogues is to become more attentive to the experience of the child and to acknowledge the child’s utter otherness as the basic precondition for pedagogical relational practice.

References