

1988 English summary of master degree paper (in Dutch) Of Dirck H. J. van Bekkum

SYNTHETIC CRAFTMANSHIP IN ANCIENT EGYPT AND FROM THE INUIT (ESKIMOS).

An orientation on the importance of traditional technology in vocational education for indigenous adolescents and from migrant families.

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Developed and elaborated under supervision of Radboud University of Nijmegen Holland (prof. dr. AA. Trouwborst), the Intercultural Institute DIES Utrecht Holland (prof. dr. R.E. Chavers) and the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden Holland (dr. G. Nooter).

As a son of a blacksmith and a former technical designer and draughtsman Dirck van Bekkum was advised in his additional training at the Dies Institute to integrate his anthropological studies with this background. Starting as an occupational therapist in psychiatry in 1983 he guided several hundreds adolescents from urban, religious, class, regional and migrant subcultures. From this experience the thesis for this master thesis was developed.

In this MA paper (200 pages) he is searching for an intercultural and historical basis in vocational training for young men in multicultural contexts. He uses the transversive-transformational method of prof. dr. R.E. Chavers, which is intercultural, dialectic and developmental-historical. It is a problem solving model for new ways and patterns in education, psycho-somatic medicine, socialisation, scientific research, art and inter-ethnic issues.

In the European history of science there are several starts towards inter-ethnic and intercultural methods. Herder, Vico, Rousseau and Husserl are briefly analysed and connected with the anthropological empirical tradition. Baas, Radin, Malinowski, Levi-Strauss, Devereux are anthropological fieldworkers who tried to tackle the ethnocentrism problem in an intercultural way. That is to say: they were willing to include the western premises and biases in their scientific work. Can one observe and analyse non-western patterns and behaviour on the same level as our own western ways of living and doing? Can we keep a constant dialectic going on between subjectivity and objectivity?

Looking in this way Levi-Strauss was able to put the "pensee sauvage" on the same level as western logics and thinking. He compares the European "bricoleur" (Jack of All Trades) with the mythical poet in tribal society. "His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with "whatever is at hand", that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous..". Chavers calls this the "science of systematic improvising". Synthetic craftsmanship & traditional technology stimulates student (and teacher) into a strict dialectic between theory and praxis, between mind and body within this science of systematic improvisation.

All technical creative and crafting manufacturing in stone, wood, metal, plastics "on location" can be coined as systematic improvising. Experience in occupational therapy with "indigenous" and "migrant" adolescents taught the author that this way of working can be very fruitful for the re-activating, re-directing and pin-pointing motivation towards vocational goals. Chavers calls this "the totemistic way", following Levi-Strauss.

A-culturation in the sense of taking in (or getting forced upon) foreign patterns without integrating them in one's personal or groups' ways, brings about confusion, alienation, estrangement and feelings of being lost, never at home etc. This is a process which in European history plays an important role in the development of science, technology and education. Reconstruction of this history of a-culturation is essential to analyse contemporary situations and problems in unemployment and vocational training of adolescents. In the second chapter the Inuit culture as "nomadic bricoleurs" is analysed and described as a totemistic culture. Their ways of surviving, living, loving, hunting, growing children are neatly intertwined with their history and environment. Hunting and making tools are two aspects of their culture that are focused upon. Chapter three works out the thesis that European technology and science are heavily influenced by Ancient Egyptian culture (through the Greek, Gypsy and Jewish cultures). The power of Egyptian culture was connected with its potential to take in foreign patterns, transform them and radiate them to cultures all over the world. This still goes on in our western ways of producing clothes, furniture, pottery etc.

Ancient Egyptians had a totemistic ordering in their mythology, religion, death cult, science, socialisation, architecture etc. The manufacturing of massive stone vases, statues and reliefs is used as an example to demonstrate this. To keep this ordering in motion through the generations they had a complex and integrated system of education and pedagogies. The teacher-student relation was called a father-son relation and was practical, structured, totemistic and synthetic.

These examples of the Inuit and from Ancient Egypt can serve to develop new models of guiding young people in their intercultural vocational trainings, on professional, symbolic, motivational and socialisation levels. This Master Thesis gives an overview of the dialectic of traditional and modern technology in vocational training and occupational therapy.

Drs. Dirck van Bekkum, December 1988