Martinus Jan Langeveld - Modern educationalist of everyday upbringing.

The educationalist Martinus Jan Langeveld (1905-1989) was often mistakenly thought to be German and it is easy to understand why. Langeveld had very close contact with Eduard Spranger, Theodor Litt, Hermann Nohl, Erich Weiniger, Joseph Dolch, Fritz Blättner and Otto Friedrich Bollnow. Urged on by Litt, he even translated his theoretical magnum opus *Beknopte theoretische pedagogiek (Concise theoretical pedagogy)* into German himself in 1951. He wrote a number of his books, such as *Studien zur Anthropologie des Kindes* (1956) and *Die Schule als wegs des Kindes (The School as the Road of the Child)* (1957) in German, and he was a member of the editorial boards of the most prestigious German educational journals. Pontgraz’s four-part compilation of autobiographical portraits of renowned German educationalists (1978) includes a portrait of Langeveld.

Langeveld was not German though; he was the Dutch educationalist who laid the foundation for pedagogy as a course of study at university in the Netherlands after the Second World War. He was at the birth of the Utrecht School, an international group of influential psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists and criminologists, who championed a human science approach. The Utrecht School is associated with names such as Frederik J.J. Buytendijk, Jan Hendrik van den Berg, Jan Linschoten and Willem Pompe. Through these associations the social sciences as a whole in Utrecht became steeped in the pedagogic project. Langeveld’s practical outlook on scholarship was hugely inspired by his clinical practice. For him, even when he was addressing the theory, it was about this child, in this situation, at this moment in time.

After he was accorded emeritus status in 1972, he made a number of visits to Japan, where he worked closely with Professor Shuji Wada, one of his former students from Utrecht in the sixties. It was Wada who saw to it that Langeveld’s *Beknopte theoretische pedagogiek* was translated into Japanese.

This chapter focuses on Langeveld’s theoretical work. After a brief introduction to his life and work, Langeveld’s outlook on his subject is explained: pedagogy as practical science. Then his pedagogic theory and how it links in with anthropology and developmental psychology are explained. His particular use of the phenomenological method is examined next, showing how this connects with situation analysis: the analysis of what those who are responsible for bringing up children are to do. Finally Langeveld’s relevance today is considered.

1 Life and work

After secondary school in Amsterdam, Langeveld went to that city’s municipal university to study Dutch and history in 1925, where from the very beginning he also showed a great deal of interest in pedagogy. His tutor, Philip Kohnstamm, put him in touch with the philosopher H.J. Pos who had studied under Husserl. It was Pos who encouraged Langeveld to study abroad. During his student years in Amsterdam, from 1925 to 1931, Langeveld also spent time studying in Hamburg under psychologists William Stern and Martha Muchow and the philosopher Ernst Casirer. In Leipzig he studied philosophy and pedagogy under Litt. He attended lectures given by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. At the beginning of his studies Langeveld was Kohnstamm’s research assistant and after he graduated he taught Dutch, history and philosophy at the Lyceum in Baarn. He obtained his doctorate in 1934 with a thesis on the ‘language and thinking’ of 12 to 14-year-olds. Immediately after he got his PhD, Langeveld went into private practice as an education and child-rearing consultant, laying the foundation for the clinical pedagogy, diagnostics and treatment practice that he was...
to develop later at his pedagogic institute in Utrecht. He was offering a service to parents of normal children who were having child-rearing problems.

A teaching post in child psychology at the *Nutsseminarium* in Amsterdam followed in 1935 and an unsalaried teaching post in adolescent psychology at Amsterdam University in 1937. In 1939 Langeveld became Professor of Pedagogy by special appointment at Utrecht University and head of the Cultural Statistics Department of the Central Statistical Office (CBS) in The Hague. During the Second World War Langeveld took over the responsibilities of Kohnstamm, who was forced to go into hiding. He finished his *Beknopte theoretische pedagogiek* in the later years of the war, a work that has been studied not only by generations of students in pedagogy at universities, but also by students at teacher education colleges, and it remained on university book lists right up to the 1980s.

In 1946 Langeveld was appointed Professor of Pedagogy, Developmental Psychology and Didactics at Utrecht University. He was actually the sole survivor after the war. A number of his colleagues did not survive the war and one or two were not permitted to come back to the university because they had shown too much sympathy with the occupiers. After the War Langeveld not only began to develop the discipline of pedagogy, but he played a major part in determining the course of the social sciences as a whole. He recruited the physiologist and physician Frederik J. Buitendijk, for instance, as well as Van Lennep who later was to gain an undisputed reputation in psychologist circles. Even more decisive for the character of psychology in Utrecht was that he managed to prevent the appointment of A.D. de Groot, a vehement critic of the human science approach.

Post-war development of education and research was still mainly dominated by teacher training and secondary education as it had been in the pre-war years. Interest in primary education was soon added to that and the 1950s saw the emergence of social-educational research and the development of special education. Separate chairs were established in these fields in these years, so that Langeveld was able to concentrate on clinical pedagogy: case work in theory and practice. The 1960s were the age of expansion and consolidation. His international influence was growing but in the Netherlands the typical Utrecht approach was coming under pressure due to the rise of empirical-analytical research. The late-60s also saw the arrival of critical pedagogy, which was especially popular among students, which saw Langeveld’s pedagogy as bourgeois and middle class. However, by the time that movement had radically changed the complexion of the university, Langeveld had already left. When he was awarded his emeritus professorship in 1972, his one-man band of 1946 had grown into a fully fledged subfaculty with a staff of around 130 and a rapidly increasing number of students.

2 Pedagogy as practical science.

It is not easy to convey an idea of Langeveld’s academic work within the scope of a short chapter. He occupies a unique position in Dutch pedagogy. He published many tens of books and more than 400 articles. There does not seem to be much left for present-day educationalists to do other than to modify and refine themes introduced or discussed by Langeveld. Because of the extensive specialization in the field, comparisons cannot be other than to the detriment of contemporary practitioners. Langeveld practised pedagogy ‘across the full range’. This does not take away the fact that all the modern subspecialisms can still learn a lot from his contributions even today. Though this chapter concentrates on Langeveld’s theoretical work, and therefore largely ignores his clinical work, it is important to stress the unity of his work. Langeveld was no system builder; his theory is too open to change for that. All the same it is coherent; the different elements fit together well; and it is precisely that
clinical interest, that concern for the individual child and his or her parents, on which that coherence is based.

It may seem odd to begin an overview of Langeveld’s theory with an explanation of his idea of science. The early editions of his *Beknopte theoretische pedagogiek* did not contain any such account. Only after ten years, in 1955, did he rather ungraciously add a chapter on ‘The scientific nature of pedagogy’: ‘Better than opening a theoretical pedagogy with a plea or a theoretical discourse or suchlike, these belong at the end and in the umpteenth edition (the fifth, B.L.) of a book, that has proved meanwhile that it can stand on its own two feet without having studied the theory of balance’ (Langeveld, 1979, p.167). He does not shy away from the fact that for him this kind of discussion of the foundations of pedagogy is of secondary importance. From the very beginning he characterized pedagogy as a ‘(...)' discipline which not only wants to know its object in order to know how things are, it wants to learn about – what it is studying – in order to know how to act' (Langeveld, 1955, p.11). (By characterizing pedagogy as a practical discipline, Langeveld was leaning heavily on the work of Litt, (cf. Bijl & Levering, 1979). The significance of his pursuing academic prestige for pedagogy at this late stage should not be underestimated as a motive. Right through to the present day things related to children have not always been taken seriously as a matter of course. Langeveld spoke of ‘The disdain for education' (cf. Langeveld, 1950). He classified pedagogy as ‘(...)' an empirical discipline, and one of the humanities, and a normative discipline, that is practised with practical intentions in mind' (Langeveld, 1979, p.178). He was contrasting empirical with ‘pure’ science that is not based on experience. Humanities are the opposite of the natural sciences, a distinction made by the nineteenth century German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey, who classified the sciences by the nature of the object studied. The attribute ‘normative’ here means that the definition of the object is dependent on value judgments. To find out what upbringing is, in contrast to the definition of what language is, for instance, you need to make value judgments, according to Langeveld. Theoretical science is about knowing how things are. A practical discipline, as we saw earlier, is about knowing how to act. Practical science is therefore fundamentally different from applied theoretical science.

To understand the precise significance of the practical intent of pedagogy, it is important to remember that clinical practice is at the heart of it. ‘(...)' what it is in fact about is helping this child in the concrete circumstances in which s/he is living (…) to achieve his/her best potential' (Langeveld, 1979, p. 174). This makes clear that pedagogy is not only about rational (theoretical) responsibility, it is also about moral responsibility (cf. Langeveld,1979, p.23). What that moral responsibility means is easy to understand when you read how certain things are dealt with in clinical case work. The descriptions of how it turned out to be impossible to deny the request ed help in a number of serious cases are not devoid of emotion – but how else could such situations be described? When in a number of concrete cases Langeveld describes how he had to get involved 'there was no turning back’, as he put it, it is clear that it was impossible to look the other way (cf. Langeveld , 1974, p. 96-98). This sense of personal responsibility for the individual child in need and his/her parents forms the basis of the researcher’s moral responsibility. 'From a pedagogic perspective, therefore, those methods that lead to *individualizing* (earlier he had ‘individual’ , B.L.) knowledge are absolutely fundamental' (Langeveld , 1979, p.174). After all it is not about a ‘(...)' mechanical combining of forces, but insightful formulation of pictures and policies for the benefit of this specific human child (…).'

There is no question, therefore, of unilateral application of a method (cf. Langeveld , 1972, p. 93), but care for the individual child remains the constant theme. Pedagogy also has a very special relationship with psychology and sociology. Pedagogy is autonomous in the sense that it determines the significance of psychological and sociological knowledge in its
own context. Psychology and sociology, according to Langeveld, are essentially situation-free disciplines. They aim at generalization and so are impractical. Moreover psychology and sociology ignore the basic fact that the child is a child that is being brought up. 'Much developmental psychology operates on the basis of the fiction of biomechanical autonomous developmental events.' (Langeveld, 1979, p. 172) Were such events to occur, then they could only be observed in a derivative form in children, according to Langeveld. This means that pedagogy needs its own pedagogic psychology and pedagogic sociology. Langeveld himself paid far and away the most attention to the former. If psychology aims to come up with valuable facts that can be applied to education and child-rearing, then its basic structure would have to be determined by pedagogic axiomatics. In other words, it would have to be based on the fundamental fact that people start their lives as small children and cannot constitute themselves into human beings without being brought up by other human beings (cf. Langeveld, 1956, p 8).

3 Pedagogy, anthropology and developmental psychology

Now that we have established the practical nature of his pedagogy, it will come as no surprise that, in his definition of what upbringing is, Langeveld arrives at the actions of parents and educators. Upbringing is what happens in the interactions between adults and children, and influence is exercised in the course of those interactions. When it comes to upbringing, the direction of influence is from adult to child. The influence is purposeful, that is to say the adults take deliberate actions to achieve the goal of upbringing.

This is not merely a statement of fact: given its full meaning the term ‘bring up’ incorporates a value judgment. If one of the defining features mentioned above is absent, then we are not dealing with a poor form of upbringing or anything of that nature, we are simply not dealing with upbringing at all. This is not to deny that children exercise an influence upon adults; what is being denied is that this influence has anything to do with upbringing. Equally it cannot be denied that adults exercise influence upon children unintentionally and it is impossible to determine the ratio of intentional and unintentional influence, but the term ‘bring up’ is reserved for conscious purposeful influence.

The essence of the relationship between the upbringer and the child being brought up is that it is a relationship of authority. This authority is defined as a moral responsibility and liability for the benefit of the minor. Clearly parental authority aims to gradually phase itself out: the child’s growing independence is its complement. That is what defines the upper limit of upbringing: when the child being brought up becomes an adult. The authority is technically necessary in upbringing. That is what defines the lower limit of upbringing: it is only possible from the moment that the child is able to recognize authority, roughly speaking from the development of language. The relationship of authority is embedded in a relationship of trust.

We will round off this description of the form of the parenting relationship by mentioning two characteristics which that relationship has to meet if it can be said to be a relationship of authority. In the first place, the authority has to be acceptable, both with respect to form and substance. The exercise of authority is an activity of the adult, who can be expected to have appropriate expectations. In the second place the authority has to be accepted in one way or another. Acceptance is an activity of the child, without whose agreement there can be no question of authority. It is these two characteristics in particular that link the characterization of the parenting relationship to its anthropological foundation, and it was Langeveld’s view of the child, in particular, that sent pedagogy off in a new direction.

The first condition, that of the acceptability of authority, is tied up with the view of the human being as 'animal educandum', as able to be brought up (educable) and as dependent on
upbringing (cf. Langeveld, 1979, p.182). The second condition, that of the acceptance of authority by the child being brought up, is tied up with the characterization of the child as a being that itself wants to become something – this is known as the emancipation principle (cf. (Langeveld, 1979, p.38-39). These anthropological assumptions about children correspond to certain principles in developmental psychology. Being dependent on upbringing, for instance, has features of the biological moment and the principle of helplessness. The emancipation principle is linked to the exploration principle (cf. Langeveld, 1969, p. 41-45). There is also a great deal of overlap between what Langeveld calls pedagogic 'trust' and what he classifies a 'security' in developmental psychology terms. 'Security' and 'exploration' are the categories that form the basis of the Columbus test, a pedagogic diagnostic test developed by Langeveld (Langeveld 1969).

There is a substantial risk of dependence on upbringing being conceived in an extremely limited way. Obviously upbringing is more than just taking care of a child, it involves testing against a goal; but 'self-responsible self-determination', the words that Langeveld chose for the goal of upbringing, seems to guarantee huge scope for individual interpretation. He did not leave it there though and so a more detailed definition that yesterday was self-evident cannot be taken for granted at all today. Langeveld, for instance, pointed to a further characteristic of adulthood that in his eyes is one of the most essential acts of the adult: the choice of a life partner. 'After all, through that choice a person takes responsibility for new life or at least takes upon him or herself joint responsibility for a spouse' (Langeveld, 1979, p. 51). Formal marriage has a much less prominent place in Western European societies than it had sixty years ago, and voluntary childlessness is now fully accepted in the Netherlands as it is in other countries.

The fact that Langeveld’s theorizing and analysis are coloured by the times in which he was working is also apparent elsewhere. The way he distinguishes between ‘upbringing’ and ‘humanization’, for instance, chimes clearly the concern about ‘the social degeneration of youth’ which so preoccupied him and which was the focus of his large-scale research in the early fifties. After the Second World War the Dutch government was trying to bring the young people that had gone astray during the war back into line and they called on educationalists to help them in this task. Langeveld wrote the final report (Langeveld, 1952). The distinction he developed between ‘upbringing’ and ‘humanization’ (= assimilation into the species) (Langeveld, 1979, p.182) shows that his proposed goal was still much more strictly bound to a specific way of life. Humanization unlike upbringing is not tested against the demands of adulthood. All it means is to grow up among other humans just as animals grow up with other animals. Humanization can be taken for granted, it is not intended but it is always accomplished. When children are left with only this minimum provision, when they are not brought up, then they are being neglected (Langeveld, 1957, p.158-159). The outcome when humanization is all that is on offer takes the form he referred to by terms such as 'polished mass youth' and 'social degeneration'. It would be better perhaps to turn the narrative on its head: 'social degeneration' is seen as an inhuman (infrahuman) form of human life and the reason why such lives occur is sought in the absence of upbringing. In this specific sense human children depend on upbringing to become people. What though does that social degeneration entail? What is the phenomenon that is being condemned?

Let us reproduce Langeveld’s picture of neglected children in full: 'They are likely to become toilet-trained late; they hardly discriminate in their reactions to different people, they are indifferent to other people, unless these people are either a threat to them or offer them some advantage; they are aggressive to those who appear weaker than themselves or a threat, etc. They have little structure to their day, nothing to do and no proper work structure. They do not work and are not willing to work, nor do they play, except in a rudimentary sensopatic way. They seek food, they seek gratification and do not concern themselves with
those who help them to get it; others are there to be used. Their faces express little, though they do betray fear or greed or hate. Their physical development manifests itself in the need to grow, in using their strength and a vague searching for an object on which they can exercise that strength. They have a limited range of expressions which are not adapted to a general audience: they come across to observers as ‘unintelligible’ or ‘too loud’ for the place they are in. They are unengaged, that is to say they do not operate from a personal core to engage with objects around them. One would be more likely to say ‘something is getting them to do something’ than ‘they are involved in something’, unless in their ego-affective world they are rushing headlong toward gratification, or pursuing or attacking an enemy, etc ... ’ (Langeveld, 1957, p.158).

4 Situation analysis and phenomenology

The pivotal role of action in Langeveld’s pedagogy is evident from the fact that for him it was essentially about situation analysis. He defines ‘situation’, in line with the work of Anton Reichling, as ‘the entirety of opportunities for experience in which people act’ (Langeveld, 1979, p.117). In simple terms, what it comes down to is that Langeveld defines situation subjectively, so it is not about all the ‘objective’ factors with which people are surrounded, but the factors with which subjects are involved in their actions. He uses different formulations to define the concept of ‘situation’. Elsewhere, for instance, he emphasizes the normative aspect of situation as ‘ ... the entirety of information with respect to which action has to be taken’ (Langeveld, 1979,p.169). At first sight, therefore, the pedagogic situation would seem to be about the parent. After all, it is the parent who acts, s/he is responsible. However, there are many occasions where the activity of the child seems to be included as part of the pedagogic situation. (Upbringing as a situation involving action with respect to the child and action by the child him/herself. Cf. Langeveld ,1972, p.93). All the same the relationship between the upbringer and the child being brought up is still ambiguous in the sense that only in the last revised edition of his *Beknopte theoretische pedagogiek* did Langeveld allow that ‘the active participation of the child in his/her own upbringing' is part of the whole phenomenon of upbringing (Langeveld, 1979, p.45). The interpretation of Langeveld’s theory that this pushes him back into the territory of the intentional, which accuses him of neglecting all manner of unintentional influences on the child’s development is a misinterpretation. In his own words: 'And even though upbringing entails far more than just the actions of a parent or educator – as there is so much that we call 'environment', 'circumstances' etc –, all the same upbringing assumes responsibility for this whole complex as the pedagogic situation, makes use of it or struggles against it’ (Langeveld, 1979, p.19).

Now this is typical of Langeveld’s way of analysing things. The concepts he developed derive their meaning from events that happen in the upbringing process itself and not from a general concept. There is, for instance, no question of a general concept of ‘agogy from which pedagogy and andragogy are derived as particular subtypes, as is sometimes assumed, just as upbringing cannot be considered to be a special form of the general phenomenon of influence or as ‘Anwendung philosophischer Einsicht auf eine besondere Situation des menschlichen Lebens’ (Applying philosophical insight to a specifying situation of human life) (Langeveld 1979, p.27). Upbringing has a character all of its own that is based on the fundamental helplessness of the child and the anthropological given of the responsibility of the adult. Pedagogy’s claims to be an autonomous discipline are based on the unique nature of the pedagogic relationship.

It is impossible, for instance, to say anything worthwhile about responsibility in the context of education and upbringing based on general philosophical analyses of the concept. Such analyses tend to be based on the premise that responsibility presumes freedom, in the
sense that we only hold people responsible for acts that they performed when they were free to do otherwise. While such an analysis is very important to a legal definition, it says nothing about the responsibilities of the parent or educator. '( . . .) And the first explanation that should be given after pointing out his personal responsibility, is that of his joint liability for what he personally has not done or was powerless to prevent; (... )' (Langeveld, 1979, p. 192).

The fact is that it is a specific characteristic of pedagogic responsibility that freedom is not presumed.

‘Parental authority’, to give another example, is not derived from power in general but has a strict meaning of its own. It is not possible to explain authority in a general sense by demarcating it from ‘power’ and pointing to a freely chosen hierarchy. Parental authority is not based on free choice but on the dependent way of being of the child. To give a final example to illustrate that pedagogy has its own conceptual framework, which results from analysis of the pedagogic situation, and which cannot be understood to be a particularization of general scientific concepts, we refer to the relationship between interaction and upbringing. When Langeveld tries to establish what 'upbringing' is and when he places 'upbringing' in the interactions between adults and children, it should be clear that upbringing is not construed as a particularization of interaction in general. Indeed without further specifying what interaction in general is, he specifies the characteristics of interaction in the field of upbringing. (In the last revised edition of BTP a confusing paragraph has been added with respect to this. Compare Langeveld, 1971, p.29-30 with Langeveld 1979, p.35).

Up to now we have been discussing pedagogic theory and related matters but have said nothing about the method of acquiring knowledge. Langeveld’s phenomenology has often been misunderstood, and the fact that he rarely had anything to say himself about his method is partly to blame for this (Langeveld, 1972, p.105-110; 1973/1974; 1979 b). It should also be remembered that phenomenology was not Langeveld’s only method. All knowledge that could make a contribution to children becoming morally independent human beings was worthwhile from a pedagogic perspective, notwithstanding the fact that it was Langeveld who reignited the debate about the phenomenological method even in Germany.

If there is one thing that is clear in Langeveld’s outlook on phenomenology, then it is how far he distances himself from the father of phenomenology, Husserl. There are no philosophical intentions behind Langeveld’s phenomenology. He does not admit transcendental subjectivity. If phenomenology were indeed to turn away from the concrete world and the concrete subject, it would not produce any knowledge of scientific relevance. It is just about making the immediate relationship between the human being and his world visible. It is about shining a light into the human world, it is about the relations of meanings in which being human in fact comes about. Langeveld replaces Husserl’s phenomenological or transcendental reduction by what he calls immanent reduction. Immanent reduction means that what he calls ‘coaccidental information’ is abandoned in three areas. The three areas are subjectivity, prior theoretical knowledge and tradition. In this way Langeveld takes up Husserl’s method without its philosophical pretentions.

Husserl’s eidetic reduction, where incidental characteristics are systematically eliminated, can also be found in Langeveld. Langeveld calls the eidetic reduction ‘the abstraction directed at the essential ( . . . )’ (Langeveld, 1972, p.107). Certain issues remain sketchy in Langeveld’s work, but when he gives an example it does become clear which type of knowledge is at issue and on what foundations this knowledge has been built. There is intuition, but not the kind of intuition that we mean when, for instance, we say that we know intuitively that we are dealing with a swindler. In that case it is induction based on insufficient facts which would normally serve us very well in everyday practical situations. Intuition in phenomenological knowing is an immediate experience that produces knowledge of a strictly
general nature. This is how we know that regret always relates to the past, while hope always relates to the future. There is no question of induction here: I will never come across any form of regret that is not retrospective and forms of hope that do not look forward are not actually forms of hope. These characteristics can be neither confirmed nor denied by the experiences of others. Phenomenological knowledge is knowledge gained from experience, but it is nevertheless knowledge a priori.

This is the point on which many misunderstandings about phenomenology in general and therefore also about a phenomenology à la Langeveld come together. The obvious question is which subjects allow themselves to be understood in phenomenological terms. We need to ask ourselves, for instance, whether the analysis of fundamental pedagogic concepts in the *Beknopte theoretische pedagogiek* really is a phenomenological analysis. It is presented as phenomenological and the line of reasoning is eidetically varied, but the outcomes allow a great deal of scope for convincing criticism and objections, even within the boundaries of historico-cultural legitimacy. Without doubt though it is phenomenology where the experience of the immediate human response to the world is being revealed, as in the analysis of *De verborgen plaats in het leven van het kind* (The hidden place in the life of the child) (1953) or in the analysis of *Das Ding in die Welt des Kindes* (The thing in the world of the child) (1956) or *Phaenomenologie van het leren* (Phenomenology of learning) (1952). Even these analyses are characterized by local colour, some of the experiences analyzed describe concrete things that are no longer of this era, but that does not affect the essence of the experiences described which were only amenable to description in their involvement with the concrete. And it is precisely that involvement with the concrete that gives the outcomes of phenomenological analyses their practical strength. To sum up: those who let fly at successful phenomenological analysis as a failed form of induction are missing the point. The immediate experience is the decisive factor. It is no contradiction that Langeveld recommended a sound philosophical education for educationalists in that context, ‘(... ) who would through that intensified form of rational thinking learn to recognize potential relationships and fundamental structures, which may in fact never have occurred in the reality of upbringing in that form but which have been consistently thought through and which as an idea underpin that which does occur unsystematically and without much thought being given to it in the real world of upbringing’ (Langeveld, 1979, p.177).

5 Conclusion: Langeveld’s relevance today

Compared with his influence in the German-speaking world, Langeveld did not have much influence in English-speaking academic circles (see Rang & Rang, 1991). He had much closer contacts with the French academic community and enjoyed a very fruitful collaboration with educationalists in South Africa. Langeveld never managed to fulfil the bridging role to the Anglo-Saxon world that his German academic friends assigned to him (cf. Hohmann, 1971, p.6). He was familiar with the work of the younger British philosophers of education, Richard Peters and Paul Hirst, and he also knew them personally, but he himself was emphatically not a philosopher of education, nor did he want to be. Langeveld’s pedagogy was an empirical discipline in the broad sense of the word. His whole life long he argued against the distorting reductionism of the empirical-analytical approach to science, which offered no serious scope at all for other research methods to be used. That attitude does partially explain why his contacts with American scholars did not go that well. His pedagogy was philosophical in so far as upbringing as a phenomenon itself generates philosophical questions. The normative questions that have to be asked in connection with the goal of upbringing and the anthropological questions that require answers in connection with the foundations of the pedagogic relationships are examples of such philosophical questions. Langeveld’s pedagogy
was not a subcategory of philosophy, therefore, but it belonged with the social sciences. However, just as pedagogy could not be reduced to the status of applied philosophy, equally it could not be considered to be applied psychology or applied sociology. This view did indeed place him firmly in the camp of German pedagogy (cf. Süßmuth, 1968, Hohmann, 1971, Warsewa, 1971, Lippitz 1997).

Pedagogy is also not confined to what goes on in school (education in the narrow sense), but covers everything that is relevant and important for a child on the path to adulthood. Education, in that broad sense of upbringing encompasses what happens within and outside the home too. On the one hand, therefore, Langeveld’s pedagogy has a broad purpose and can present itself as a multidisciplinary subject in its ideal form; on the other hand, it specializes in the study of the personal relationship between parents and children. The relationship between teacher and pupil is also seen primarily as a pedagogic relationship, as convincingly expounded in the work of the Canadian educationalist Max van Manen for instance (cf. e.g. Van Manen, 1991). It was Van Manen who brought Langeveld’s ideas to the attention of North American educationalists. He made a number of Langeveld’s older articles available to them by publishing them in English translation in the journal he founded *Phenomenology and Pedagogy*.

One of Langeveld’s most exceptional contributions must be his introduction of the idea of ‘the worth of the child’. It had been recognized for almost 200 years that children were a different kind of creature from adult human beings. That discovery is generally attributed to Jean Jacques Rousseau. But the insight that being a child should be considered a fully fledged mode of human life and not merely a temporary clearing house on the path to adulthood, that insight belongs to Langeveld. According to Langeveld, what typifies children is that they want to grow up at the same time as they want to be children, and with that assertion he creates an image that is as impossible as it is striking. Respecting children therefore means both giving them the opportunity to grow up and the opportunity to be children.

Langeveld's work was continued in the seventies and eighties by two of his students at his own subfaculty of pedagogy at Utrecht University. Ton Beekman took on theoretical pedagogy and Rob Lubbers took up the chair in clinical pedagogy. In his PhD thesis Beekman developed the practical science concept for modern times but later, under the influence of the work of Paul Feyerabend, his theories developed in an increasingly anarchistic direction. He also democratized Langeveld’s phenomenological method. Where phenomenology in Langeveld’s time was still mainly a subject for erudite, literary, highly gifted intellectuals, Beekman started from the idea that actually anyone should be able to apply the phenomenological method as an empirical method (cf. Beekman & Mulderij, 1977; Barrit et al., 1985). This found its best expression in the life-world research of Beekman’s students Hans Bleeker and Karel Mulderij. Their research into the conditions for child-friendly living environments and their research into the perceptions of children with motor disabilities, elevated Langeveld’s idea of the worth of the child to the highest norm (cf. Mulderij & Bleeker, 1982; Bleeker & Mulderij, 1986). Lubbers’ clinical pedagogy assigned an important role to image communication in diagnostics and treatment. Lubbers emphasized the hermeneutic aspects of Langeveld’s work rather than the phenomenological. Thirteen years after his retirement Langeveld contributed to a volume on hermeneutic diagnostics of Lubbers in 1985 (cf. Langeveld, 1985). However, because his students lost their battle against the dominance of empirical-analytical methods as time went by, Langeveld's work faded into obscurity.

The concrete picture that Langeveld had of the goal of upbringing, adulthood, was, as we have seen, undeniably of its own era. The concrete social manifestations of adulthood that Langeveld described strike us now as old-fashioned, but the psychological traits that he
ascribed to adults are also outdated in a way. The stable character traits that Langeveld observed young people developing around the age of 21, are not attained in our times before the age of 30. Only then do people accept responsibility for another life. The average age at which Dutch women have their first child is now 32. Viewed from the perspective of its pretentions to universal scientific truths, it is perhaps problematic that the findings produced by concrete phenomenological life-world research are certainly products of their own times. However, it is precisely that datedness that gives the knowledge much of its practicality, that is what makes it a practical discipline. In that case therefore it is much easier simply to distance oneself from those universal pretentions. The postmodernist critique that emerged as a philosophical movement in the period when Langeveld stopped publishing strike at the heart of the potential universal pretentions of Langeveld’s theoretical concepts. Sticking with the goal of upbringing: Langeveld’s open formulation ‘self-responsible self-determination’ can no longer be seen as a description of a state that can really be reached, at best it has to be conceived as an indispensible ideal for the upbringing process. Postmodernism has shown us that people are not able to become anything like as autonomous as Langeveld assumed based on the old Kantian ideal of autonomy (cf. Levering, 1991).

Not only the upper limit of upbringing, the goal of upbringing, was a problem, the lower limit of upbringing as formulated by Langeveld has also come under attack. Since the 1960s there has been ever increasing interest in very early mother-child interaction in developmental psychology. The old assumption that early childhood learning comes down to imitation has been found in a particular way to be false. It is not the child that imitates the mother, it is the mother who imitates the child. The child does not babble away in imitation of its mother, it is the mother who “answers” the child. The parent-child relationship is a two-way relationship from the very beginning, not just from when the child starts to talk (the moment that the child can accept, and so can also reject, parental authority). The Amsterdam educationalist Ben Spiecker redefined the concept of the ‘pedagogic relationship’ because the original lower limit had lost its meaning (Spiecker, 1984). According to Spiecker, the parent manages to draw the child into the human community by treating the child as a developing person from the very beginning, and the parent believes in that from the moment the child is born. Anyway Langeveld’s lower limit to upbringing had been criticized before, because it had long been clear that young children have other ways to show that they refuse to cooperate than simply spoken language.

As a modern educationalist in the socio-politically compartmentalized country that the Netherlands was in the post-war years, Langeveld developed a pedagogy that was acceptable to both the Christian and humanist sectors of the Dutch population. He established the subject at university level – in research and teaching – across the full range, concentrating himself mainly on theoretical pedagogy and clinical pedagogy. In Germany only his theoretical work attracted attention, but there too he is seen as one of the most important educationalists of his time. Postmodernist criticism of modern scholarship’s optimism about what governments can achieve does not apply to Langeveld’s pedagogy. He was more convinced than anyone of the fact that a normal upbringing has nothing to do with ‘making’ a person, and he always tried to prevent too many social demands being put upon pedagogy.

References


