

For the Russian edition of “Beyond PISA” by Christel Manske:

Foreword by Professor Dr Ludmilla Obuchova, Developmental Psychology Moscow State University.

I have known Christel Manske for so many years. During that time I have learned so much about her life and work and also about myself. For both of us, this has grown into a deep understanding based on sympathy and mutual respect. We belong to the same generation and share similar memories. Mine go back to 1941 in Moscow when German bombs were falling and my family was starving. In 1945, at the same age, Christel remembers witnessing the sheer cruelty of war. (This episode is described in the epilogue to this book). My memory became a personal triumph in 2003 when, with my son and grandson, we all ate ice cream outside the Reichstag. For Christel Manske, the publication of this book in Russian was the confirmation of her deep connection to Russia based on the friendship and never-forgotten kindness of Russian soldiers at the end of the war.

Now, we are united by our shared professional interest in the work of children with endogenous or exogenous developmental delay. My briefer experience is based on the teaching of blind and deaf students at the Moscow State Institute of Psychology with the cooperation of the Institute Head, T.A. Vlasova. Christel Manske, on the other hand, had decades of experience working with children with developmental issues who need qualified psychological and educational support.

At the beginning of the 60's, while working at a special school, she first came across children who had “failed” at school. This led Christel to take a closer look at the phenomenon of “school failures.” Her knowledge was deepened by her study of clinical psychology, psychoanalysis, psycho diagnostics, various learning theories and social psychology.

Christel studied at Munich and Hamburg as well as teaching at Cologne, Kassel, Kiel Bremen, Managua and Fulda. She acknowledges all of these experiences as contributing to her development as psychologist, pedagogue and researcher.

The experiences of children with special needs in reading, writing, and mathematics lessons were recorded by Christel Manske in her numerous publications, books and films. These have brought her recognition, not only in Germany but throughout Europe and the Americas.

Today, when I think of leading pedagogues of the 20th Century: M. Montessori, F. Dolto, E. Pickler I also want to add Christel Manske. In her many books, she shows what can be done for children when medicine is powerless. With knowledge that is based on psychology and pedagogy. This knowledge and perspective brings new insights to help children with mental and emotional issues.

Christel Manske has found a unique way of teaching children with physical, mental or sensory challenges. Her personal professional experiences were influenced by the Cultural History School of L. Vygotsky, A. Leontiev, P. Galperin, D. Elkonin and P. Freire whose educational ideas were described in his book, “The

Education of the Oppressed.”(Interestingly, there is a photo of Freire and Manske in conversation at the University of Hamburg).

Another significant influence has been Stephan Palos, guru, Professor of Tibetan Culture, Doctor of Medicine with a Diploma in the Teaching of students with disabilities. One of his books, “Chinese Healing Art (2002) was also published in Russia..

In 1966, the Christel Manske Institute for the Development of Functional Brain Systems was founded in Hamburg. Its goal was to enable children to learn whatever their disabilities, psychological, social, or physical. I was fortunate to be able to observe Christel Manske at work at her institute and to discuss with her and the staff, ways and means of rehabilitating children with Downs Syndrome, ADHD, autism and cerebral palsy, children who exist beyond the norms of PISA.

For Christel Manske, learning is a journey of discovery where the destination is unknown. It is a way to “open up to people of an unknown field of activity”. In her opinion there are no “bad students”. This misguided opinion of some teachers is based on seeking the cause of the failures in the children rather than the way the teacher communicates with them. This communication is often inadequate and does not fit the child’s stage of development. L. S. Vygotsky emphasizes that the greatest mistake is committed when a child with learning difficulties is categorized as an illness.

The issues of a special child can only be helped in a socio-economic framework not pathologizing. For Vygotsky, this approach defines the concept of “defect” as a social rather than a biological phenomenon. The main medium of social experience is language. Vygotsky shows that without language neither consciousness nor self-confidence is possible.

This book shows a way of developing a complete language in a child with Downs Syndrome. On the one hand, the coordinated hand-eye-lip movement has to be built up while learning to read. Yet, on the other hand, all graphemes (signs) are symbolically conveyed as hand gestures and phonemes (sounds) are developed as phonetic and written language. All of this takes place, of course, in the context of a positive relationship between the child and the adult. This congruence is fundamental to all the work.

In this learning process with children with Downs Syndrome, the reader is led to appreciate Vygotsky’s law of higher mental functions. This law states that the transition from the social to the individual from the shared activity with the adult to the self-development of the child takes place in the psychical development, from the inter psychic to the intrapsychic. We can observe the special emotional concern of the child with Downs Syndrome towards the adult, and we should also orient ourselves in this learning process.

At this point, it is good to remember Vygotsky’s idea that it is necessary to deal with the inner psychological structure of every healthy child to achieve ambitious goals in the learning process.

The dyad, pedagogue: child is a common phenomenon in all existence and development. Each individual system has its own particular pace, drama and time. The experience of the educator with each individual child is unique and only repeatable in a limited way. Much depends on the individual characteristics of each

member of this dyad. Children out of the usual range of abilities present the adult with ethical and social challenges. As carers, we need to question our own weaknesses, prejudices, myths and misinformation. Christel Manske emphasizes that that while working with a child, she is not thinking of the theories of Vygotsky, Piaget or Freud

She focuses on the child in front of her, in the moment. She looks for communication even when the medium of language is not yet developed. Christel uses theory for the reflection on and interpretation of her experiences. When she refers to Vygotsky, she is clear she does not hoard her knowledge like antiques in a cabinet; for her Vygotsky's discoveries are like a light that keeps shining into her work with the children. The question of what is special and what is normal in educational work is very complex. It is not only connected with scientific discourse but with the moral courage of the educator to question and be reflective. It depends on the personality of the educator and her understanding of her mission. Her enthusiasm and her highest ethical motivation. Christel Manske has a keen sense of this process of interaction and well knows its fragility and instability. Again and again, she refers to the idea of mutual complementarity of educator and student, each with her own tasks and possibilities; "The other person remains alien to us into the extent that we are alien to ourselves.

In this book, the author appears as an honest, interested communicator that the relationship between educator and student is fundamental to the pedagogical task.

The author becomes a friend on this journey for the reader. Her book is both a reflection of the literary skill of the author and also her humanist dignity. Christel Manske's book changes and challenges our understanding not only of the pedagogical task but also our consciousness of ourselves. It stimulates us to engage in our own unique journeys both personally and professionally.