

A revised version of this paper will be published in Management Decision Vol 48 Issue 4 due to be published in May 2010. This will be open access at <http://info.emeraldinsight.com/drucker/index.htm>

From Inspired Teaching to Effective Knowledge Work and Back Again

— A report on Peter Drucker's schoolmistress and what she can teach us about the management and education of knowledge workers

Purpose — It is widely believed that Peter Drucker's defining encounter with the practice of management occurred during a study he did at General Motors between 1943 and 1945. This paper argues that he experienced much of what he later came to call the practice of effective knowledge work as a boy aged nine or ten at an utterly exceptional Viennese elementary school. Drucker's experiences there allow a new perspective on the education of knowledge workers today.

Design/methodology/approach — The paper uses accounts by and about the school's owner-manager Eugenie Schwarzwald, some of which were made available only recently in the course of biographical research projects dealing with this revolutionary pedagogue and social entrepreneur.

Findings — The paper identifies surprising similarities between the teaching practice at Schwarzwald's schools, her approach to leadership and Drucker's principles of effective knowledge work.

Practical implications — Combined, Schwarzwald's practice and Drucker's teachings (a) challenge some seemingly up-to-date practices in both higher education and corporate personnel development and (b) help us to understand what actually produces effective personal learning for the rapidly changing knowledge economies of the 21st century.

Originality/value — The paper introduces selective aspects of progressive education to the field of management.

1. Introduction

Peter Drucker's most significant time at school was his final year at elementary school. According to his own, detailed report on his school days in Vienna, this turned out to be the only time spent at school of any significance (Drucker, 1979). What made this one year so special was the fact that there he was taught how to learn. This proved to have a lasting influence, strengthened by close social ties between the Drucker family and the circle around the school's owner-manager Eugenie Schwarzwald, with whom Peter

Drucker continued to stay in touch till his emigration to England in 1933.

The paper is organized in four parts:

Part 1 and 2 report on Eugenie Schwarzwald and her schools. This was made possible by recent biographical research projects rediscovering this Austrian pioneer of progressive education and social entrepreneurship (Streibel, 2001; Holmes, 2009; Hofmann-Weinberger and Bittermann-Wille, 2009). Schwarzwald's own archive was lost when her schools were forced to close down in 1938. These research projects re-collected materials on and by Schwarzwald and made them available to a broader public. Among these are yearly reports on the schools between 1902 and 1913 and a relatively large number of newspaper articles written by Schwarzwald explaining her practical approach to education. Unlike Maria Montessori and Ellen Key, with whom she was in contact, Schwarzwald did not create a theory or a new school of education.

Additional vivid, but sometimes quite taunting reports on Schwarzwald and her work stem from authors otherwise known for their literature. The most detailed and for our purposes most valuable portrayal comes from Alice Herdan-Zuckmayer (1979), who dedicated four autobiographical volumes to Eugenie Schwarzwald.

Part 3 draws attention to amazing similarities between Schwarzwald's approach to teaching and leadership and what Peter Drucker decades later taught about management (e.g. Drucker, 1954 and 1967) and especially about the management of knowledge workers (e.g. Drucker, 1959 and 1999).

Part 4. No matter how interesting speculations on the actual influence of Schwarzwald on Drucker's ideas might be, the third part concentrates on today's education of knowledge workers. The combination of Peter Drucker's idea and Eugenie Schwarzwald's practice sharpen our understanding of what produces effective personal learning and in doing so challenge some seemingly up-to-date practices in both higher education and corporate personnel development.

2. Eugenie Schwarzwald

Eugenie Schwarzwald was born in 1872 in Eastern Galicia and died in Zurich in 1940 as a refugee of the NS dictatorship. It was also Zurich where she received her PhD in German Studies, as one of the first female Austrians to earn a doctoral degree. While at that time women were not explicitly excluded from Austro-Hungarian universities, there

were no schools to prepare them for the necessary exam.



Plate: Dr. Eugenie Schwarzwald

by courtesy of Österreichische Nationalbibliothek

[A reproducible copy can be supplied, should the paper be accepted for publication]

When Schwarzwald came to Vienna in 1900, immediately after finishing her own university education, she therefore had a clear mission in mind — namely, to offer adequate secondary education for female students (Schwarzwald, 1911 and 1920). And so she did. She took over an existing finishing school (Mädchenlyzeum) and in 1901/02 started the first four-year program (Gymnasialkurse) to qualify women for university entrance with 22 students (Schwarzwald 1902, Mayer, 1955). Later Schwarzwald founded a full eight-year secondary school for women focusing on natural science (Weissel 1955), a three-year school for home economics, Vienna's first coeducational elementary school (Schwarzwald, 1908), and a kindergarten. To accommodate the growing number of students and teachers, the schools were moved to the top floor of a newly constructed office building in the centre of Vienna— adapted by Adolf Loos, then a much disputed pioneer of modern architecture. In all these ventures, Schwarzwald held the position of a private owner-manager, constantly struggling with public authorities.

Besides her educational ventures, she was active in two additional areas. During and

after World War I, Schwarzwald shifted her attention to large scale projects to help the Viennese population cope with severe food shortage. She organized cooperative kitchens, summer camps for children and parents, and sent children abroad to recuperate (Schwarzwald, 1925). A further activity was to run a salon, where she brought together the artists and intellectuals of her time (Drucker, 1979; Herdan-Zuckmayer, 1979).

Many of these endeavours proved to be of lasting success, especially the schools. But her way of managing things did not escape criticism. Quite a number of influential authors characterised her as a busybody unnerving the people around her with a continuing flood of initiatives e.g. Elias Carnetti, Karl Kraus, Robert Musil, Alfred Polgar and Egon Friedell (Hall, 1983). This, however, primarily shows that “Frau Doktor” — as she was called — was a leading figure among Viennese intellectuals and artists in the first decades of the 20th century.

3. A School for Effective Learning

Drucker’s mother, Karoline Bondi, who went on to study Medicine, was among Schwarzwald’s first students and his father Adolf, then a high-ranking civil servant, was her very first part-time teacher (Drucker, 1979, p. 41) together with people like Hans Kelsen (the author of the Austrian Constitution and husband of Peter Drucker’s Aunt Margarete), Oskar Kokoschka, Adolf Loos, Otto Rommel, Arnold Schönberg, and Egon Wellesz. In fact, it is hard to find intellectuals with some sort of relationship to Vienna between 1900 and 1938 who were not connected to one of Schwarzwald’s ventures and in most cases also knew her personally. Peter Drucker is no exception here. Only in recent decades has Schwarzwald’s implicit influence slowly trailed away with the decease of the last generation of her former students.

Drucker himself attended Schwarzwald’s coeducational elementary school in 3rd grade (presumably 1918/19). In his high-school years, he spent — in his own words — “as much time as possible” at the Schwarzwald school (Drucker, 1979, p. 42), fascinated by her way of teaching, and became a regular guest at Schwarzwald’s salon at their home in Vienna’s 8th district. The two chapters “Henne and Genia (Eugenie Schwarzwald)” and “Miss Elsa and Miss Sophy” are evidence of the depth as well as scope of the influence this encounter had on him.

So what made the Schwarzwald schools so special? The answers to this question are based on Herdan-Zuckmayer’s (1979) and Drucker’s (1979) memories. Both spent two

years at a traditional elementary school before going to the Schwarzwald school, which made them all the more aware of the differences.

The first factor is Eugenie Schwarzwald herself and her way with people. She had a powerful grip on her students' attention simply by challenging them to make the extra effort. "Leadership by demand" — one might call it.

The next factor is an extensive dedication to individuals. Drucker gives a vivid description of how the teachers, in his case Miss Elsa and Miss Sophie Reiss, sat down with each pupil to individually agree on goals with respect to the pupil's talents, limitations and work habits. In the case of Herdan-Zuckmayer, it was Miss Clara and Miss Sophie Reiss who provided plenty of space to learn about things she was interested in and who were then sincerely interested in her results. The three Reiss sisters seem to have been the core staff of the elementary school.

A third factor is unambiguous feedback. Despite being given considerable space for individual development, both Herdan-Zuckmayer and Drucker report that within a year of joining the new school, they not only learned about their specific talents but were also told by the teachers in friendly but clear terms what they were not good at.

4. Progressive Education and Knowledge Worker Management

Interestingly, Drucker presents these — even by today's standards — advanced teaching practices in a section of the "Bystander" titled "Reports from Atlantis", where he describes the sometimes charming but altogether backward-oriented Austrian Society, totally focused on the seemingly golden years of the late Austro-Hungarian Empire in the two decades before World War I — the society Drucker was to leave behind as soon as he finished high school. And he was right of course: Austria then proved to be unable to orient itself towards a new way of life, despite its considerable intellectual potential. After Schwarzwald's schools were shut down in 1938, her activities sank into oblivion, only to be rediscovered in recent years. This, of course, had political reasons. In retrospect, however, her individualistic approach was not suitable for the education of an industrial, mass society. In fact, it served the needs of only a tiny fraction of the population well, namely of liberal intellectuals and artists (for a corresponding list of well-known Schwarzwald alumni including celebrities such as Anna Freud, Helen Weigel or Hilde Spiel, see Jörgler et al., 2006).

Beginning in the 1960s, when Drucker first started to write about knowledge work and the management of knowledge workers, the core ingredients of Schwarzwald's approach for handling people were being revived. But this time they were relevant for a much larger and growing part of the working population (Barley, 1994 and Wolff, 2005). Their main points were (Drucker, 1999):

- accepting that people are all very different and therefore do their work in different ways
- being concerned with a person's strengths, while also being aware of their weaknesses
- concentrating on a few but challenging goals and demanding that people do better all the time
- acknowledging the need for precise feedback — not just praise — as the irreplaceable basis for personal development
- having a preference for pragmatic work rather than dogmas, doctrines and -isms of all kinds.

The striking similarities between Schwarzwald's approach to progressive education and Drucker's teachings about productive knowledge work raise several questions.

A biographical question. How much was Drucker actually influenced by Schwarzwald's example of inspired teaching and leadership? My guess is that the influence was considerable. To mark his 90th birthday, I wrote a short paper suggesting that he learned the basics of modern management in Miss Elsa's class. To test my "hypothesis", I sent him a copy. Back came a very kind, handwritten card but no protest.

A managerial question. Are good teaching and effective management actually one and the same? The answer is no, because the two activities have different goals. But there is a sizeable overlap between the two, due to the fact that productive teaching needs to be managed and management cannot be understood without learning — especially when it comes to knowledge intense organizations (Nonaka et al., 2008) . In addition, management and teaching are both concerned with people. It should, therefore, not come as a surprise that the two in part follow similar principles.

An educational question. If we combine Schwarzwald's one-hundred year old but still progressive approach to education with Drucker's concepts of knowledge work and

management, is there anything we can learn for today's education, especially higher education, and continuing training for knowledge workers?

It is this last question I would like to dedicate the concluding section of this paper to, because the new realities of knowledge-based economies are challenging the current education systems.

5. Conclusions — Productive Education

In sharp contrast to Drucker's but also Schwarzwald's way of approaching education, the ongoing debate — at least in German speaking countries and as far as I am aware — is still heavily loaded with proud, pedagogical theories and sociopolitical dogmas and doctrines. In recent years this has also often been spiced up with buzzwords borrowed from business management to make things look more up-to-date.

The issue here is, of course, the justified request for higher quality. Most approaches to getting there, however, are obsessed with standardization — a paradigm which used to be appropriate for an industrial, mass society but one which is no longer suitable for a society where knowledge has become the prime production factor. For example, the so-called Bologna Process, a framework to align higher education throughout Europe, has had an enormous influence on structure and content. Among other things, it forces universities to declare which knowledge and skills every student will acquire in a given course or program and how many working hours an average student has to devote to it. In theory, this should enable universities to turn out students who reliably meet well-defined, minimum quality standards and who, therefore, smoothly fit into international mobility programs and have standard career paths for potential employers. All this seemingly addresses the needs of personnel managers, university administrators, national and international authorities and, of course, the media to compare individuals, institutions and even national education systems.

But how often are university students under such circumstances really going to receive the straightforward service Peter Drucker got at Eugenie Schwarzwald's school 90 years ago — the systematic support for recognizing individual talents and plenty of space together with some cautious guidance for developing them?

The aim of standardization is to define a binding reference framework for education and training, since a knowledge society cannot afford to leave these core activities to

chance. However, as Drucker pointed out more than once (Drucker 2000), knowledge workers are all very different. Consequently, to educate such a person in a productive way, the only appropriate reference is her or his individual talents, and nothing else. Every other approach will inevitably focus learning on weaknesses instead of strengths and, therefore, encourages mediocrity, bores students and teachers alike and restrains individual progress.

Finally, besides a strict focus on talent, there is one more point to be learned from Schwarzwald and Drucker — namely a concern for real results. While traditional education systems tend to underemphasize strength, current reform schools which practice progressive education and in doing so provide ample space for individual development, tend to be too soft on results. However, to effect productive learning as well as knowledge work, ongoing concern for real results and systematic and unambiguous positive but also negative feedback with regard to the person's individual abilities, and not to some international standards, are essential too.

References

- Barley, S. (1994), "The Turn to a Horizontal Division of Labour: On the Occupationalization of Firms and the Technization of Work", Working Paper, US Department of Education, Washington D.C.
- Drucker, P.F. (1954), *The Practice of Management*, Harper & Row, New York, NY.
- Drucker, P.F. (1959), *Landmarks of Tomorrow*, Harper, New York, NY. Drucker, P.F. (1967), *The Effective Executive*, Harper & Row, New York, NY. Drucker, P.F. (1979), *Adventures of a Bystander*, Harper & Row, New York, NY. Drucker, P.F. (1999), *Management Challenges for the 21st Century*, HarperCollins, New York, NY.
- Drucker, P.F. (2000) *Management & leadership — Organization of people and work around information*, Video, Vol. 3, MTS Publishing, Naperville, IL.
- XXX. (1999), XXX
- Hall, M. (1983), "'Frau Doktor' Eugenie Schwarzwald", *Das jüdische Echo Wien*, Vol. XXXII No. 1, September 1983, pp. 113-115.
- Herdan-Zuckmayer, A. (1979), *Genies sind im Lehrplan nicht vorgesehen*, S. Fischer, Frankfurt am Mai.
- Hofmann-Weinberger, H. and Bittermann-Wille, Ch. (2009), "Frauen in Bewegung: Diskurse und Dokumente der österreichischen historischen Frauenbewegung 1848-1918", available at homepage of Österreichische Nationalbibliothek: <http://www2.onb.ac.at/ariadne/vfb/index.htm>, (accessed 20 June 2009).
- Holmes, D. (2009), "Biographie Eugenie Schwarzwald", *Projekt Geschichte der Biographie*, Ludwig Boltzmann Institut für Geschichte und Theorie der Biographie, available at homepage of University of Vienna: <http://gtb.lbg.ac.at/index.php?pld=f39010hg13957hov200545&mediald=1&languageid=DE> (accessed 20 June 2009).
- Jörgler, D., Schweitzer, E. and Reisinger, Th. (2006), "Eugenie Schwarzwald, Pädagogik in Leben und Werken", available at homepage of Institut für Erziehungs- und Bildungswissenschaft, Graz: <http://www-gewi.uni-graz.at/piluwe/author?id=76> (accessed 20 June 2009).
- Mayer, A. (1955), "Gesellschaft der Schwarzwaldschen Schulanstalten/Wien — Lyzeum, Frauenoberschule, Gymnasialkurs", Mayer, A., Meissner, H. and Siess, H. (Ed.) *Geschichte der Österreichischen Mädchenmittelschule*, Vol. II., Österreichischer Bundesverlag, Vienna, pp. 57-60.
- Nonaka, I., Toyama, R. and Hirata, T. (2008), *Managing Flow — A Process Theory of*

the Knowledge-Based Firm, Palgrave MacMillian, Basingstoke, UK and New York, NY.

- Schwarzwald, E. (1902), Jahresbericht des Privat-Mädchen-Lyzeums, Schuljahr 1901/1902, Vienna, available at homepage of Österreichische Nationalbibliothek http://alo.uibk.ac.at/webinterface/library/ALO-BOOK_V01?objid=12010&zoom=6 (accessed 25 June 2009).
- Schwarzwald, E. (1908), "Koedukation — Enquête über die gemeinsame Erziehung von Knaben und Mädchen", Neues Wiener Journal, 7 June, pp. 4-6.
- Schwarzwald, E. (1911), "Zur Mädchenschulreform", Neue Freie Presse, 14 January, pp. 23-25
- Schwarzwald, E. (1920), "Die Mädchenschule der Zukunft", Interview with Eugenie Schwarzwald, Der Morgen, 3 March, p. 4.
- Schwarzwald E. (1925) "Die Ochsen von Topolschitz. Eine Geschichte aus dem sterbenden Österreich", Neue Freie Presse, 25 December, p. 18.
- Streibel, R. (2001), "Eugenie Schwarzwald", available at homepage of Volkshochschule Hietzing: <http://projekte.vhs.at/ESchwarzwald/> (accessed 25 June 2009).
- Weissel, J. (1955), "Gesellschaft der Schwarzwaldschen Schulanstalten/Wien — Das Mädchen-Realgymnasium", Mayer, A., Meissner, H. and Siess, H. (Ed.) Geschichte der Österreichischen Mädchenmittelschule, Vo. II., Österreichischer Bundesverlag, Vienna, pp. 60-63.
- Wolff, E. (2005), "The Growth of Information Workers in the U.S. Economy", Communication of the ACM, Vol. 48, No. 10, pp. 37-42.