
On the Need to Ask Educational Questions about Education: an interview with Gert Biesta

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ABSTRACT This interview attempts to articulate what it might mean to speak for 'Pädagogik' in an era where new trends in education run the risk of marginalizing 'Pädagogik' as an independent academic discipline. This trend can be found in several European countries and is judged by Herner Saeverot and Gert Biesta to be a development that is cause for concern.

Introduction

This interview should be seen in the wake of 'A Manifesto for Education' (Biesta & Säfström, 2011a), which raises important questions about education. One of the things we discuss is the tendency that educational research, at least in some European countries, seems to overlook the important contribution from the German tradition of *Pädagogik*. Another German concept, 'Bildung', which indeed is important for the field of education, seems to be reduced to an instrumental rationality. Moreover, we discuss the differences between the Anglo-American view of education and the continental one, and also how difficult it is to talk about education in different languages.

Herner Saeverot (HS): The first time I read 'A Manifesto for Education', I read it in its original language – English. When I later read the Norwegian translation, published in the journal *Første steg* (Biesta & Säfström, 2011b), I was very disappointed. Here the translator had chosen to highlight that you speak on behalf of schooling (*utdanning*). In my view this is a huge misunderstanding of what the manifesto is trying to say, hence, I made the choice of re-translating it into Norwegian. Speaking on behalf of schooling, doesn't that mean that you speak on behalf of all of those who are engaged in schooling – which all disciplines are involved with in these days, from psychology to sociology, to philosophy, history and to political science, etc? It is precisely here that the problem starts, as I understand the manifesto. When the discipline with the most comprehensive history and culture with regard to upbringing, teaching, *Bildung*, and schooling, i.e. the Norwegian tradition of *pedagogikk* [1] (which is connected to the German concept of 'Pädagogik'), disappears, after which other disciplines begin to control and govern schooling, then schooling will be impoverished; it loses an important perspective of freedom, which is one of the main interests of *pedagogikk*. This shows how fragile a translation actually is. In this case, the Norwegian translation of the manifesto has simply overlooked the most significant aspect and has more or less gone in the opposite direction of what the manifesto suggests, i.e. as I understand it, in the direction of *pedagogikk*. Do you speak on behalf of schooling or *pedagogikk*? And can you elaborate on some of the differences between these two concepts?

Gert Biesta (GB): Your question does indeed raise a very important issue, which has to do with what it is that we are trying to ‘stand up’ for in the manifesto – but also what kind of language we can use to do so. While the ‘original language’ of the manifesto was indeed English (this was the language in which the manifesto was written although, in the mean time, it has been translated into Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, Danish, German, Icelandic, and Spanish), there is already the question whether the language in which the manifesto was ‘thought’ and conceived was also English. And here I would say that at least for my part the thinking that I put into the manifesto was explicitly *not* English – if there is such a thing as English thinking! – but was very much informed by my understanding of and familiarity with the German notion of *Pädagogik* (and also the Dutch notion of *pedagogiek*). One of the main frustrations of my move from the Netherlands to England in 1999 – apart from a large number of advantages and positive aspects that particularly have to do with significant differences in academic culture between the two countries – has always been that the language in which I had ‘grown up’ as an educational scholar is so radically different from the ways in which the whole ‘field’ of academic work in and on education in the English-speaking world is constructed. I have recently written an article in which I try to express some of the differences and trace their historical origins (Biesta, 2011).

The main difference, as I see it, is that in the English-speaking world education is seen as a particular (social) phenomenon that can be studied. In order to study this phenomenon in all its manifestations and dimensions, the idea is that one needs to make use of theories and theoretical orientations and frameworks from ‘real’ academic disciplines, such as sociology, philosophy, history, psychology, economics, and so on. However, what is missing in this list – at least from my perspective – is *Pädagogik*, or, to use a construction that in the English language is actually quite difficult to give meaning, what is missing is an educational ‘perspective’ on education. (In my article from 2011 I show how, for some people whose frame of reference is formed by the Anglo-American construction of the field, this idea is literally non-sensical.)

Now why might one need *Pädagogik*? The main argument here – at least the one that in my view is the most convincing – has to do with the question, how we can actually identify a particular social reality *as* ‘education’? While we can answer this question in a common sense way – and quite often people do not tend to see the problem when I ask this question as they think that it is entirely obvious what education is – I would say that we need those forms of conceptualising and theorising that have been developed within the tradition(s) of *Pädagogik* in order to be able to identify a particular practice or a particular set of activities as a ‘case’ of education in a way that does not rely on an unquestioned common sense idea of education. (And there are further complexities here, as one could argue that, while in England much of the discussion centres around this single word, in other languages there are a number of different words and concepts that can be deployed – such as *Erziehung*, *Bildung*, *Ausbildung*, *Didaktik*, etc. in German.) This is not to suggest that there is only one answer to this question, but the important point for me is the question in itself, and recognition of the importance of the question.

For me this is very concrete. Because even if it is granted that education is something that can happen or occur in a school – and I wouldn’t object to that idea, of course – it is actually quite difficult to figure out what it is in the school that should ‘count’ as education and what wouldn’t. Or, even if, in the building with the word ‘school’ on the outside, we would be able to identify those people who claim to be teachers, it is actually quite difficult to figure out which aspects of what they do ‘count’ as education and which do not.

While, as said, one can give a range of different answers to this question, one answer that I still find very interesting is the one developed by proponents of what in Germany became known as *geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik*. They argued that what allows us to identify a particular activity or practice as educational is related to the particular *interest* that informs the activity or practice – an interest which they roughly defined as an interest in the freedom of the pupil or student. If this interest is not present, then we can still talk about influence (and perhaps – I would like to return to that – even about *Bildung*), but then words like ‘training’ are much more appropriate than ‘education’ (or in German *Sozialisation* more than *Erziehung*). That is why, in my 2011 article, I have characterised the ‘Continental’ approach as an ‘interested’ approach and the Anglo-American as ‘objective’ in the literal sense of the word, i.e. there the field is organised around an ‘object’ albeit that, in my view, the field doesn’t really have the theoretical resources to identify ‘its’ object.

Your question also raises a second issue, which is the question who can claim the 'right' to speak for education. In a sense this is, of course, an absurd question as we live in a free world in which everyone should have the right to speak about everything. But the issue here is not whether one is allowed to speak or not – the more important issue has to do with the differences between the ways in which, say, a sociologist speaks about education and an 'educationalist' (if we can use that word for the moment) would do. And here I would say that whereas a sociologist speaks out of a sociological interest – for example the interest in trying to explain how schooling contributes to the reproduction of social inequality (which is a very important question) – that is a different 'interest' than the interest from *Pädagogik*, the educational interest so to speak. (I use the German word *Pädagogik* here rather than the Norwegian word *pedagogikk* but we can come back to that, of course.) So while it is entirely legitimate for sociologists to ask sociological questions about education (that's their job), just as it is for psychologists to ask psychological questions, or for historians to ask historical questions, such questions – both in their 'intent' and their 'effect' – need to be distinguished from the *educational* questions that educationalists can generate. That also means – and at this stage I can only say this rather 'quickly' – that while sociological insights about education can be interesting and important, we cannot simply 'translate' them into educational action, and the main reason for this is that they are generated from a sociological rather than an educational interest. (I consider Jacques Rancière's critique of Bourdieu, both in *The Philosopher and his Poor* (Rancière, 2004) – where he does it explicitly – and in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (Rancière, 1991) – where he does it more implicitly – extremely relevant for seeing what the problem here is, i.e. that an application of Bourdieu's insights into educational programmes does not do away with the ways in which education contributes to the reproduction of social inequality, but actually reinforces this.)

So the issues here are complicated, but they are really important in my view.

HS: You clarify the intent of the manifesto very clearly. As indicated, the Norwegian word *utdanning* is much closer to the English word 'schooling' than, say, *pedagogikk*. Following the Norwegian translation of the manifesto, you would in fact speak on behalf of 'schooling'. But why would you want to write a manifesto in which you stand up for 'schooling'?

GB: You are right that the point of the manifesto is not about schooling or not, but about a particular 'quality' of schooling, one might say – and in English I would call that an educational quality, but in Norwegian it is a quality that seems to me a quality that has to do with *pedagogikk*. (In Dutch I would definitely call it a *pedagogische kwaliteit*.) And then you can indeed see that in the manifesto we point at a number of different conceptions of schooling – which can also be seen as arguments for particular forms of schooling – we want to distinguish ourselves from, precisely because they lack the educational orientation. One is schooling connected to 'what is' and the other is schooling connected to 'what is not' – and we try to suggest that both options run the risk of taking the orientation towards freedom out of schooling.

HS: When I try to hear what the opposition might say, I imagine, among other things, that you may be accused of being a 'Puritan', i.e. one who strives for the purity of *pedagogikk*; free from other discipline's impact on the domain of *pedagogikk*. Don't you pour water over the opposition's mill, and the opposition consists of a very big group, as many disciplines have a strong interest in schooling and education as a whole. Education has in fact become 'big business', where virtually all disciplines want to have a piece of the big sack of money. Thus one can imagine that the manifesto's request to stand up for *pedagogikk* will emerge as a strong threat to the opposition, not only from philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, and others, but you may even expect resistance from the pedagogues (those who are involved in the academic discipline of *pedagogikk*), as many pedagogues in recent years have been educated through an idea that has almost been regarded as common sense; viz., the idea that *pedagogikk* should not have a greater role than other disciplines with regard to education. This can also be seen in light of the sharp influx of the idea of 'educational science' (*utdanningsvitenskap*), which is not a particular science for *pedagogikk*, but a science in which virtually all disciplines – yes, even disciplines which have never, historically speaking, had an interest in education – are integrated. How would you meet such a resistance?

GB: I understand the point, but I hope to have clarified that my concerns are not about defending some kind of pure 'essence' of pedagogikk, but about articulating what the distinctive angle is that pedagogikk brings to research and practice, and why this angle is so necessary. But I am aware that politically – and here I first of all mean the small politics of academia – this is not always a popular argument, partly because some people see pedagogikk as outdated, as something from the past, and partly because there is more money and prestige to earn in other disciplines than pedagogikk. I have to admit that one of the reasons for my move to England had to do with the fact that in the Dutch academic world there was less and less space for pedagogikk – partly because of the increasing influence of developmental psychology, partly because of the very specific historical development of the field (where, for example, pedagogikk has always been much more connected to upbringing in the family and society and to the area of special education and care than with the whole domain of schooling – a very unfortunate split, in my view). But I am finding that the questions that we can find in the tradition of Pädagogik, and the rich variety of answers that have been given over time, do not go away. From that angle it is rewarding to see that within the field of teacher education in the Netherlands there is a growing interest in what Pädagogik has to offer. That gives me some cause for optimism, because it shows that Pädagogik has indeed things to offer that are distinctive and unique, and also that sooner or later everyone who is involved in education – and particularly in school education – is faced with the questions that are so central in the tradition of pedagogikk (such as questions about purpose, about influence, about authority, about asymmetry, and so on).

HS: That's good to hear, but on the other hand, one can also see that pedagogikk in today's huge focus on education is, paradoxically enough, in big trouble, not only Norway, but also in countries like Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and even Germany. A while back I attended a university symposium which addressed the question, 'What is "pedagogikk"?'. Two persons coming from other disciplines than pedagogikk each had a lecture on the topic, while a pedagogue was asked to give a brief comment on their lectures. The example points to some of the problems that pedagogikk is facing in these days where education and educational science is so dominant: pedagogikk is pushed to the sidelines, while other disciplines with very different interests than pedagogikk are located at the centre, not just in terms of questions about education, but also when it comes to questions about what pedagogikk is. Now, why is this happening in relation to pedagogikk? I think there are many reasons, but one reason may probably have to do with internationalisation, which has been of great interest in Norway the last few years. It is, of course, in many ways very positive that higher education has become more internationally oriented, but, as I see it, it has also had its price. The reason being that the pedagogues and other professionals have allowed themselves to be governed and controlled by an Anglo-American concept of 'education'. As you point out in the article 'Disciplines and Theory in the Academic Study of Education', the field of research on 'education' in the United Kingdom (UK) and North America is not considered to be an independent academic discipline (Biesta, 2011, pp. 182, 189). The idea rather is that the study of education necessarily depends on other disciplines, primarily psychology, sociology, philosophy and history. The case is completely different when it comes to the German concept of 'Pädagogik' (and the Norwegian concept of 'pedagogikk'), which is an academic discipline in its own right, independent of other disciplines (2011, p. 189). In the Anglo-American tradition, however, 'education' cannot stand on its own, which is why this tradition has introduced such concepts as philosophy of education, psychology of education, sociology of education, history of education, etc. This trend has also been common in Norway. In the beginning, pedagogikk was under the authority and control of psychology, but eventually other disciplines pushed themselves into pedagogikk which became a hyphen-discipline in a broader sense (Sæverot & Torgersen, 2012). This is also evident in *Education 2020 (Utdanning 2020)*, which is a Norwegian research programme of schooling, from kindergarten to doctoral education. In the policy document, *Work Programme: Norwegian educational research towards 2020*, pedagogikk is hardly mentioned, and when it is mentioned it is claimed that pedagogikk is dependent on other disciplines:

Pedagogy [2], special needs education and subject didactics comprise key disciplinary areas within educational research, but educational research also involves research within the *social sciences*, such as economics, political science, law and sociology, as well within the *humanities*,

such as history, philosophy and the history of ideas. The sector's need for knowledge increasingly requires cross-disciplinary approaches. (Norges forskningsråd, 2008b, p. 16)

Admittedly, the document underlines that pedagogikk, along with special needs education and subject didactics, should be a key disciplinary area regarding educational research, but the problem is that the document does not say anything about the role of pedagogikk and its special responsibility with regard to educational research from other disciplines, both the social sciences and the humanities oriented disciplines. Is not the danger, then, that other disciplines may control education, at the expense of pedagogikk? In the manifesto, on the other hand, you think that pedagogikk must have a key role with regard to education. Why is that so? Would it be so bad if other disciplines took this role? What would happen if pedagogikk does not have a role to play with regard to education? And, what would happen if pedagogikk had a greater role than it has these days with regard to education?

GB: You raise a number of important issues here, so let me try to address them all. There is indeed the problem of internationalisation, because in the contemporary world internationalisation implies in most cases that one becomes Anglophone – and this simply expresses something about the current geo-political balance and how this is reflected in academic circles. While English is a very useful language and while it allows for quite a lot of communication to happen – such as the communication between you and me – it is not a neutral language, not some kind of neutral medium through which everything can be expressed and translated. As we can exactly see in the issues we are talking about, the conceptual and semantic structure of English with regards to educational matters is entirely different from that in Germanic languages or Norwegian, and therefore it is not only very difficult to translate from one language to the other, but when doing so things really are transformed because the conceptual options and connections that are available in one language are simply not there in the other. That's why people for which English is a foreign language need to be quite vigilant about what happens when English enters the scene (which, again, is precisely what we are talking about).

A brief observation about the historical point you make: while in some countries Pädagogik indeed developed out of psychology – perhaps as a kind of moment of 'emancipation' – this is definitely not the universal pattern. One thing to bear in mind here is that education and psychology are both young fields and in some situations they came to maturity together (that's probably how I would look at developments in the USA). In other cases there was Pädagogik long before there was psychology (that, I think, would be a more accurate account of the developments in Germany and perhaps also France). One of my PhD students conducted a really interesting study into the formation and transformation of education as a discipline in the Netherlands, and actually found that the opposite was the case, that is, that psychology had to emancipate itself from education, more than the other way around. So in terms of this (eternal) hate-love relationship between education and psychology, it's important to be aware that there are different historical patterns.

This is important for looking at the question of the role of pedagogikk – let's use the Norwegian notion for a while – in relation to other disciplines. While I have no fundamental objection to the contribution of other disciplines – on the contrary, if they do their work properly they have a lot to offer, and by doing their work 'properly' I mean that they stick to their expertise and don't think that a psychological argument is automatically also an educational argument, for example – my point is that pedagogikk needs to play the central role, partly because it provides the 'access' to the 'object' of research, but, more importantly, because it has – or at least should have – the theoretical, conceptual and pragmatic 'devices' to transform sociological or psychological insights into educationally relevant practice. And this, so I am inclined to say, is the very thing that sociology or psychology cannot do out of themselves, which also means that pedagogikk has a special responsibility here and needs to work very hard in figuring out what this responsibility is. (We shouldn't think, of course, that pedagogikk has all the answers – that would be an arrogant position. My point is that pedagogikk stands for a particular set of questions and interests and needs to work hard and focused on those questions and interests; and that is an ongoing task. In a sense the manifesto can be read as standing in this tradition and trying to address these issues.)

To recap that briefly: while the insights generated by those disciplines are useful and important, they are not educational insights in themselves, so we need pedagogikk to 'transform' them into insights that educationally matter and that can 'work' educationally – and I put 'work' in quotation marks because education never 'works' in the simple and straightforward sense of the word.

HS: Here in Norway we are also facing the problem that different people, and that includes the pedagogues themselves, have repeatedly discussed whether the concept of 'pedagogikk' ought to be removed from fields such as, for example, teacher education. As we saw in the above-mentioned policy document, one begins to take for granted that *utdanningsvitenskap* (education science) is a key term, under which pedagogikk is included. Moreover, we begin to see that pedagogues and others have begun to locate pedagogikk under the concept of 'education science'. Don't these pedagogues shoot themselves in the foot? By that I mean to say that they open the door for other disciplines to enter education, which at first sight seems to be a positive thing – for example in the sense that pedagogikk as an academic discipline does not become isolated from other disciplines – but it would be naive to believe, I think, that this is solely positive. And that has to do with the fact that there is lots of money in the education sector, so that there will be a battle for funds. Consequently, many disciplines force their way into educational contexts, with the danger that pedagogikk only becomes one (less significant) discipline in education contexts. So it may end with, and it has indeed already happened in many ways, the downfall of pedagogikk, meaning that its role in educational matters will be greatly reduced. What do you think about this, seen from an outside point of view?

GB: I would like to respond at two levels. At one level I agree that this is a worrying 'move' – if even the 'pedagogues' don't want to stand up for pedagogikk it makes you wonder who will. (Or you can also ask: if such pedagogues don't want to take the responsibility that they have, then perhaps they are in the wrong job.) But there is one aspect of the discussion that needs some further nuance – and you have to tell me whether what I am saying is relevant in Norwegian, but it does make sense, for example, in Dutch. The issue here is that *Pädagogik* not only stands for a particular academic discipline, but that the word is also used to refer to a particular practice or way of practicing. In Dutch, people have tried to express this by making a distinction between *pedagogie* (without a 'k') and *pedagogiek* (with a 'k') – the one being the practical activities of upbringing and education, and the other the academic discipline. This hasn't really become very common, however, so most people just use the word 'pedagogiek' to refer to both. From this angle one might say that pedagogikk should perhaps be the word we use at the level of practice, in which case we need another word to refer to the academic discipline. Then a word like 'utdanningsvitenskap' presents itself as an option, and this option has indeed gained prominence in countries where there is a tradition of pedagogikk – such as in Germany with the notion of *Erziehungswissenschaft* (albeit that I wouldn't translate *utdanning* with *Erziehung*) or the Dutch *opvoedingswetenschap*. The problem with such a notion, though, is that it can quickly become 'objective' – i.e. *utdanningsvitenskap* as the *vitenskap* (science) of *utdanning* and then the whole question of the particular educational perspective can easily disappear. Some people would still prefer this over pedagogikk – you can find this for example in the work of Philip Meirieu in France who uses *pédagogie* to refer to the practical field and 'sciences d'éducation' for the academic field (and it is interesting, of course, that 'sciences' then appears in the plural, which is a particular characteristic of the development of the field in France, I would say). In Germany, there has also been a shift from *Pädagogik* to *Erziehungswissenschaft* – known as the realistic turn (*realistische Wende*) which happened in the 1960s. Some see that turn already as the moment where the field lost its disciplinary 'heart', but others would say that *Erziehungswissenschaft* (in the singular) always had *Pädagogik* at its centre. The worrying thing here is that in Germany the field now seems to be shifting from a singular denotation – *Erziehungswissenschaft* – to the plural notion of *Bildungswissenschaften* and colleagues in Germany have argued that this shift will eventually lead to the end of the unique role of *Pädagogik*.

HS: The situation you describe is clearly relevant also in relation to the situation in Norway. As I see it, pedagogikk may easily drown or lose its function as soon as it becomes subject to a term

such as 'utdanningsvitenskap'. And when the word Pädagogik is not 'there', but only claimed to be integrated into the concept of 'utdanningsvitenskap', is not the danger, then, that one indeed does not think *pädagogisch*? I say this on the basis that the languages and vocabularies we use actually determine how we think and act. Let me take a concrete example, again from Norway, an example which actually has similarities with the situation in Germany, as you describe it. In the nursery sector the word *oppdragelse* (which is quite similar to the German concept of 'Erziehung') has recently been removed and replaced with the concept of 'dannelse' (Bildung). A term which has been related to pedagogikk for hundreds of years has been removed with one stroke of the pen. But to think in terms of dannelse – or in some kind of dannelse, I should probably say – suggests, naturally enough, another way of thinking than if we were to think in terms of oppdragelse. Furthermore, and this is very serious, to eradicate concepts, such as 'oppdragelse', is equivalent to wiping out a certain form of thinking. What's your opinion on this matter?

GB: I do agree that language is very important here, because the language – or languages or vocabularies – that we have available allow us to think, speak and argue in very particular ways. The introduction of different terms – particularly if we don't think of them as isolated terms, but as part of conceptual networks in which some operations and connections are possible, and others not – thus significantly impacts not only on what can be said, but also on the rationality of what can be said. So to shift from oppdragelse to dannelse does indeed announce a really fundamental shift that not only impacts on thinking, but also on acting and, ultimately, on the self-perceptions of those who are acting.

HS: So, let us imagine that it will be a matter in Norway of inventing a new term in order to distinguish between *pädagogischer* practice and pedagogikk as an academic discipline, would you then suggest that it is important that such a concept is based on pedagogikk, something like *pedagogikkvitenskap* for example, as opposed to the concept of 'utdanningsvitenskap' – that not only is poorly adapted to pedagogikk, but actually minimises the role of pedagogikk in educational contexts?

GB: Yes, that would be important indeed, because I think that pedagogikk represents a very particular way of looking at and understanding educational practices – one, as we say in the manifesto, that has an orientation towards the freedom of the one to be educated – while utdanningsvitenskap has no such orientation at all.

HS: Traditionally people think that pedagogikk is first and foremost important with regard to children, and that it is less important the higher up you go in the education system. But in the manifesto you actually claim that pedagogikk is important all the way, from kindergarten to higher education. How come?

GB: Let me be brief here. Pedagogikk, as we put it in the manifesto, has an interest in freedom. Traditionally freedom has been seen in education as a kind of end state. We can find this in the idea that children need to learn how to 'deal' with their freedom, and once they are able to do that – once they are able to take responsibility for their actions – then education has finished. That does indeed tie up education strongly with a notion of the child (although I would also say that it actually defines the child in terms of a particular conception of education). For me, freedom is never something that can be possessed, but is rather a challenge that is always there. Freedom is something that can be achieved in particular moments and contexts, but then it disappears again. That's one reason why I think that we cannot simply connect pedagogikk to children – it is actually quite naive and problematic to do so – but need to connect pedagogikk to the question of freedom. And that is an ongoing question. This doesn't mean, of course, that every situation where the question of freedom poses itself is an educational situation. But as soon as there is teaching, as soon as there is a situation where someone has the aim to influence someone else, the educational issues, the issues of pedagogikk, are all there.

HS: In Norway there is now an exciting debate about dannelse, which seems to have gone in another direction than what the manifesto suggests. Specifically, I am thinking of a new anthology

on *dannelse* (over 800 pages), in which ‘everyone’, ranging from politicians to philosophers, scientists, etc., writes as if they were pure experts on *dannelse* (Hagtvedt & Ognjenovic, 2011). *Dannelse* has been virtually everything and nothing, something everyone can have an opinion about, without tying the concept to any history and, even worse, without tying it to *pedagogikk*. If we go back to the heydays of *Bildung* (*dannelse*), for example Goethe, we see that *dannelse* had an interest in *Menschwerdung*, i.e. an interest in becoming human. The German tradition of *Pädagogik* has this interest, as you point out elsewhere (Biesta, 2011, p. 189). Thus *Pädagogik* (as well as *pedagogikk*) is a normative science, in that it has this special interest. When other scientific disciplines talk about *dannelse*, they draw in their interests, with the consequence that *non-pädagogische* interests are mixed into *dannelse*, which initially had a *pädagogisch* interest. Again, we can imagine counter-responses which, for example, claim that it is important that ‘everyone’ has a say when it comes to *dannelse*, as that will give a more complete picture of what it means to be human. For example, we will have the biological perspective on human, the psychological, the sociological, etc. In short, we will have both the humanities perspective and the natural scientific perspective on what it means to be human. What comes to your mind in relation to this?

GB: I have indeed noticed the interest in *dannelse* and I see some of this happening in the English-speaking world as well (though at a much more modest scale, but there are people who seem to expect that once the English-speaking world has figured out what *Bildung* is, all problems will be solved). I have also seen this *Bildungsbible* – if I can refer to this huge book in this way – and it makes me uneasy (Hagtvedt & Ognjenovic, 2011). What is good about it, I think, is that it generates an interest in questions of values and purpose, because – if I have perceived it correctly – the renewed interest in *dannelse* in Norway seems to raise questions about the broader purposes of education, and perhaps even more so in higher education than in school education (but I may be mistaken here). There are indeed also aspects of the tradition of *Bildung* that connect well with what *pedagogikk* is interested in, particularly the question of ‘becoming human’. But we can of course become ‘human’ in so many different ways (including ways that for some would actually account as examples of becoming ‘inhuman’ – which is what Adorno had in mind when he coined the idea of *Halbbildung* – half-*Bildung*). This is one of the points where I think *pedagogikk* has an important and unique contribution to make. So the ‘pedagogues’ in Norway need to work hard to make this contribution! *Pedagogikk* has also unique things to contribute to the discussion about processes – and all too often I see that when philosophers or historians or sociologists become involved in these discussions they are very good at articulating what should be achieved, that is, at formulating educational agendas, but have no clue about the complexity of educational processes, including those aspects that make the very idea of agenda setting in education quite problematic. (If you want an example how this can go wrong, you should look at Amy Gutmann’s book *Democratic Education* [1999]. The philosophical treatment of the notion of democracy in that book is in my view interesting and quite sophisticated, but as soon as she starts talking about education all this sophistication goes out of the window, and we only get an agenda for what needs to be done, but no real sense of how this might be achievable, or not, in and through education.)

What concerns me about the popularity of *dannelse*, therefore, is that there is a risk that it turns into a huge socialisation effort, one where cultural and moral standards of ‘good’ behaviour are being formulated and where educational institutions then get the task to fit everyone into those standards. Again *pedagogikk* has important insights to offer here, particularly by showing that the issue of ‘becoming human’ is precisely not a matter of socialisation, but something that always also lies beyond that – in my book *Good Education in an Age of Measurement* (Biesta, 2010), I use the word ‘subjectification’, that is, ‘becoming a subject of action and responsibility’ to distinguish the educational orientation from what, ultimately, is a sociological orientation.

HS: *Dannelse* in Norway has moreover been given a liberal turn, and yet again we submit to the Anglo–American hegemony. Already in the preface of the mentioned anthology, the Editors refer to several US universities as role models for the Norwegian educational system (Hagtvedt & Ognjenovic, 2011). And as a result of the liberal turn, the concept of freedom is referred to in a completely different way compared to the manifesto’s concept of freedom. The Norwegian thinking of *dannelse* is given a liberal conception of freedom, which goes back to the Enlightenment idea of the individual’s rights and the like. The danger is that *dannelse* becomes a

kind of individualisation process where the individual is in the centre; a kind of freedom without any demands of responsibility. On the other hand *dannelse* also has, through its focus on tradition, history and culture, become a kind of socialisation process, where the individual shall become, by way of simple and direct educational processes, socialised and integrated into a predetermined order, be it a sociocultural, religious, political, or moral order (cf. Biesta, 2009). What this brief background suggests is that education is about to become poorer as *pedagogikk* is excluded from *dannelse*. In contrast to both individualisation and socialisation, you introduce the concept of 'subjectification', which goes beyond the Anglo-American and liberal perspective on freedom and also well beyond the relatively popular idea of a deliberative democracy. Can you elaborate on this and also say something about why *pedagogikk* must play a central role in this context?

GB: I have already hinted a little at this. I agree indeed that there is a risk that *dannelse* simply becomes a new word for 'socialisation' and that it misses the orientation towards what I do indeed refer to as 'subjectification'. While the opposition between the two words is easily expressed, it is quite difficult to make – a theme that is central in my 2006 book, *Beyond Learning*, where I try to figure out if we can still make the distinction between socialisation and subjectification after what, in philosophy, is known as the 'death of the subject'. I take the 'death of the subject' as the suggestion – which I think is basically correct – that in our world it is no longer possible and no longer desirable to define the 'essence' of the human being, because as long as we try to do so we run the risk of excluding everyone who does not or cannot live up to this definition. While we should not make this more dramatic than it is, I do agree with philosophers, such as Emmanuel Levinas, that this is one of the key lessons we need to learn from the Holocaust, which precisely operated on a definition of who was to be included into the definition of the human and who would fall outside of it (and could therefore be disposed of). I value the double meaning of the notion of 'subject' because it not only means the one who is the origin of an action, but also the one who is *subjected to* the consequences of those actions and thus needs to take responsibility for those consequences – an idea I sometimes formulate as 'the subject of action and responsibility'. I would also say (and have argued, both in my 2006 and my 2010 book) that our uniqueness is not to be found in how we differ from others as unique, free, unconnected individuals, but rather in the way in which we experience that we cannot let ourselves be replaced by others, which is in those situations where someone else does an appeal to me and not just to 'someone'.

This helps to see the danger that you are hinting at, that is, the reading of *dannelse* through the eyes of liberal philosophy which, to put it starkly, indeed has nothing to do with *dannelse* (or less starkly: should have nothing to do with *dannelse*) because it's (liberal) conception of freedom is precisely not what we can find (and here I would add from the perspective of *pedagogikk*: should find) in the tradition of *dannelse*.

HS: In the manifesto you are particularly critical of the sociology of education and the psychology of education, but what about the philosophy of education? Would you say that philosophy of education is a problem for *pedagogikk*?

GB: Yes, I would – which may sound ironic coming from the mouth of someone who is Editor of a journal called *Studies in Philosophy and Education* and who, moreover, has been honoured with being the first president of the USA Philosophy of Education Society from outside North America. But there are two issues here. One is that when looking for a 'home' for my interests in the English-speaking world I have always found North American versions of philosophy of education being most 'close' to my own interests. This doesn't mean that there is a perfect 'match' between North American traditions of philosophy of education and the traditions of *Pädagogik* that I care about, but there is definitely sufficient overlap and connection. Having said this, within the field of philosophy of education there are those who see it as a form of applied philosophy and hence as a branch of philosophy, whereas others see it more firmly positioned within the field of education. I feel more at home in the latter approach – which doesn't mean that I don't value the contributions from the former approach; on the contrary, but they do suffer from the problems I have mentioned above, particularly the 'gap' between the philosophical and the educational argument. That is why, in the English language, I keep asking what it might mean to ask educational questions about education and I keep trying to develop arguments for the need to ask educational questions about

education. And while I tend to think that there is a fundamental difference between the English language and languages such as German and Dutch and Norwegian, I am beginning to see that other people are taking up this issue of asking educational questions about education – which makes me happy.

Notes

- [1] Although it is tempting to translate the Norwegian word 'pedagogikk' as 'pedagogy' this would not really capture the meaning of 'pedagogikk'. I have therefore decided to leave this word untranslated in what follows.
- [2] The Norwegian concept of 'pedagogikk' which is used in the Norwegian version of the same policy document – *Programplan for Utdanning 2020. Norsk utdanningsforskning fram mot 2020* (Norges forskningsråd, 2008a) – has in fact been translated as 'pedagogy', but that is, as indicated in the above, a huge mistake. 'Pedagogikk' is a much broader concept than the Anglo-American concept of pedagogy.

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