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Can the prevailing description of educational reality be considered complete? On the Parks-Eichmann paradox, spooky action at a distance, and a missing dimension in the theory of education¹

Gert Biesta

Introduction

On 15 May 1935 the journal *Physical Review* published a paper with the title ‘Can the quantum-mechanical description of physical reality be considered complete?’, authored by Albert Einstein, Boris Podolsky and Nathan Rosen (Einstein, Podolsky & Rosen 1935). In the paper the authors argued that the prevailing interpretation of quantum mechanics – the so-called Copenhagen interpretation – contained a paradox and could therefore not be seen as a *complete* description of physical reality. The paradox, which subsequently has become known as the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen paradox, has to do with the fact that particles can interact in such a way that it is possible to measure both their position and their momentum more accurately than Heisenberg’s uncertain principle would allow for, unless measuring one particle would *instantaneously* affect the other. The latter, however, would require that information travels faster than the speed of light, and such ‘spooky action at a distance,’ as Einstein called it, was considered to be impossible.²

The question I address in this paper is, in a sense, similar to the argument put forward by Einstein and his colleagues, in that I wish to explore to what extent the prevailing description of *educational* reality that can be found in contemporary research, policy and practice can be considered complete. The motivation for asking this question stems from an educational paradox to which I will refer as the Parks-Eichmann paradox. This paradox has to do with the fact that what appears as educational success from one perspective, is actually quite problematic when viewed differently, whereas what appears as educational failure may actually reveal something that is of crucial importance educationally. The paradox thus leads to the suggestion that the prevailing description of educational reality – to which I will refer as the ‘paradigm’ of education as *cultivation* – is insufficient or incomplete.

I use the work of John Dewey to highlight key characteristics and key shortcomings of this ‘paradigm’ and argue that it needs to be supplemented by what I will refer to as an *existential* educational ‘paradigm.’ I highlight the distinction between the two paradigms through the question whether it is possible to educate ‘directly’ – an option which Dewey explicitly denies. I then turn to the German notions of *Bildung* and *Erziehung* in order to explore to what extent they provide us with a set of concepts for articulating the distinction between the two

¹ I would like to thank Johannes Bellmann for his very helpful insights in the German discussion about *Bildung* and *Erziehung*; and I would like to thank Dietrich Benner for allowing me to read the manuscript of his latest book.

² In contemporary physics it is assumed that this phenomenon exists, though not as action at a distance.

educational paradigms. I will show that this is not as straightforward as it may seem, as there is no agreement about the exact definitions of the terms. However, having *two* terms rather than just the word ‘education’ is important in order to be able to make the distinction I am after, and here the terms *Bildung* and *Erziehung* are helpful. I conclude the paper with a brief sketch of the ‘existential work’ of education in order to outline what the existential paradigm implies for educational practice.³ But let me begin, then, with a paradox.

The Parks-Eichmann paradox

On 1 December 1955 in the city of Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks rejected the order from the driver of the bus she had boarded to give up her seat in the ‘colored’ section to a white passenger,⁴ just as Claudette Colvin had done nine months earlier (for the latter see Hoose 2010). Although Parks did comply with the message on the sign in the bus which read “white forward, colored rear,” she refused to obey the driver’s authority to assign seats, which eventually led to her arrest.⁵ This triggered the so-called Montgomery Bus Boycott which lasted from 5 December 1955 until 20 December 1956, the day on which a federal ruling was implemented that declared that the Alabama and Montgomery laws about passenger segregation on busses were unconstitutional.

On 11 April 1961 a special tribunal of the Jerusalem District Court began the trial of Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi *SS-Obersturmbahnführer* who had been tasked with organising and managing the logistics of the mass deportation of Jews and others to ghettos and extermination camps in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe during World War II. After a lengthy process, Eichmann was convicted on 15 counts of crimes against humanity, war crimes, crimes against the Jewish people, and membership of a criminal organisation, although he was not declared guilty of personally killing anyone. On 15 December 1961 Eichmann was sentenced to death by hanging. The appeal against the verdict was eventually denied, as was a request for clemency, and Eichmann was eventually executed on 1 June 1962. What made Eichmann’s case famous (see, e.g., Arendt 1963) is the fact that he *did* admit arranging the mass deportation of Jews and others but denied responsibility for the consequences – their extermination – on the account that he was only following orders.

When looked at from an educational angle, the cases of Rosa Parks and Adolf Eichmann present us with a paradox. If we assume, as is done in a still growing number of research

³ In Biesta (in press) I discuss the implications for educational research.

⁴ For the details see https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/12/01/5-myths-about-rosa-parks-the-woman-who-had-almost-a-biblical-quality/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.34441056eb50; last accessed 22 March 2019.

⁵ Parks has been very clear about her reason for not giving up her seat. “People always say that I didn’t give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn’t true. I was not tired physically, or no more tired than I was at the end of a working day... No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in.” (Parks 1992, p. 116)

studies and in a still increasing number of schools, colleges and universities, that education is an intervention that is supposed to bring about certain pre-defined effects or outcomes, and if it is also assumed that the more effective the link between intervention and outcome is, the more successful education can be considered to be, then it seems as if we should declare the education of Adolf Eichmann a success and the education of Rosa Parks a failure. With Eichmann there was, after all, a perfect match between what was expected from him and his own actions. Eichmann had learned to listen well, so we might say. And although Rosa Parks was able to effectively decode the messages that were targeted at her – her functional literacy was in order, as was her ability to understand laws, rules and regulations – she obviously didn't act upon this understanding.

The paradox, however, has to do with the fact that what appears as success (Eichmann) or failure (Parks) from the perspective of effective instruction and successful learning – education as qualification and socialisation (see Biesta 2009) – turns out to be the opposite when viewed from what we might term the 'humane' perspective, that is the perspective of existing-as-subject – education as subjectification (see *ibid.*). This then raises the question of the exact 'status' of the latter perspective and how it relates to the former. For an answer to this question I turn to an interesting argument in the work of the German educational scholar Dietrich Benner.

Does education make a difference?

In a fascinating passage in his book *Allgemeine Pädagogik* (Benner 2015), Benner asks whether education matters, that is, whether the work of parents, teachers and other educators makes a difference to the one being educated. He approaches this question in the context of the nature-nurture debate, and asks what the relative contribution of nature, nurture and education to the formation of human beings might be. This seems to be an important question for educators, because if it turns out that our genetic make-up (nature) would account for, say, 75%, and the influence from the environment (nurture) for, say, 20%, then there is very little scope left for education to make a difference. This issue is particularly important in our time, partly because there are studies that suggest that the contribution of our genetic-make up is even higher than 75% (see, e.g., Harris 2009), and partly because many parents and teachers really struggle to limit the influences from the outside world on their children and students, for example in relation to what enters the home and the school through social media.

While one might expect that Benner, as an eminent professor of education, would try to make the case for a rather large contribution of education vis-à-vis the influences from nature and nurture, he comes with the remarkable suggestion that irrespective of what percentage one would claim for nature on the one hand and nurture on the other, together *these always add up to 100%* (see Benner 2015, p. 73). Rather than reading this as an argument for giving up on education altogether, Benner pursues a different line by arguing that the educational

question⁶ – and hence the orientation of the educational work of parents and teachers – is actually of an entirely *different order*. An order that is not ‘bio-neuro-socio-cultural,’ to use my own words, but thoroughly *existential*.

Education, so Benner suggests, is not about the ways individuals are shaped from the inside-out, so to speak, that is as a result of the development of their genetic make-up and biological constitution, nor is it about how individuals are shaped from the outside-in, so to speak, that is, as a result of influences from the environment. This is not because these processes do not happen, but because education is interested in an altogether different question, namely the question how human beings, as individuals, *exist*, that is, how they try to lead their own life, make choices, say ‘yes’ to some opportunities and ‘no’ to others, get out of bed in the morning or have a lie in, fall in love, are faced with illness, grow old, feel joy and guilt, and so on.

If the question of nature and nurture is about the way in which the human organism develops and grows, both as a result of ‘internal’ biological processes and influences from the outside, the educational question, to put it briefly but accurately, is about how an ‘I’ can step forward from all this. And here we can find the *educational* reading of the Parks-Eichmann paradox, because whereas Rosa Parks did step forward as an ‘I’ – an ‘I’ who asserted that she did no longer wanted to be part of the particular societal order she found herself in – Adolf Eichmann, when asked, said that his ‘I’ was actually not involved, other, that is, than in following orders. He was, in other words, willing to submit his ‘I’ to the societal order. Whereas Rosa Parks’s ‘I’ stepped forward, so to speak, Eichmann withdrew his ‘I.’

Viewed in this way – and this is the point Benner is after – we can say that the educational question is not the question of *who* we are and how we (have) become who we are – which is the question of *identity*. The educational question rather is the question of *how* we are, how we exist, how we try to lead our own life, what we will do with who we have become, with what we have learned, with the skills we have acquired, with the competencies we have developed, but also with our incompetence, our blind spots, the things we are not able to do, and so on. Rather than identity, this is the question of what we might refer to as our ‘*subject-ness*,’⁷ our way of and our attempts at existing-as-subject of our own life, not as object of influences from ‘elsewhere’ (see also Gösling 1993).

With the help of Benner, I have made a rather strong claim about what education is, arguing that education is concerned with the question of the ‘I’ and, more importantly, with the question how the ‘I’ *exists* as ‘I.’ I wish to emphasise that the point I am trying to make is not

⁶ Where I use ‘education’ in this context, Benner uses the word ‘Erziehung.’ I will explain below why and how this matters.

⁷ I prefer the rather awkward term ‘subject-ness’ over the word ‘subjectivity,’ as the latter runs the risk of being read as an epistemological category, not an existential one, and it is the existential ‘perspective’ that I am after here.

semantic – it is not about the definition of the word ‘education’ – but is about identifying a dimension of educational reality that runs the risk of disappearing from sight if we only think of education in terms of effective instruction and successful learning. How we ‘name’ this dimension is important as well, and in relation to this question there is a problem with the fact that the English language only seems to have one word – education – to speak about the reality of education, so to speak. This is why, below, I will have a look at the two concepts, *Bildung* and *Erziehung*, that play a central role in the vocabulary of German educational scholarship. Before I do so, I would like to say more about the two ‘dimensions’ of educational reality that I seek to bring into view in this paper suggesting that, in addition to a ‘paradigm’ that sees education as cultivation, there is also the need for what I will refer to as an existential ‘paradigm’ of education.

Paradigm 1: Education as cultivation

The paradigm of education as cultivation is interested in the way in which human beings become who they are as a result of the interplay of ‘internal’ factors and ‘external’ influences. It focuses, in other words, on the way in which human beings become and continue to become who they are through their engagement with ‘culture’ in the broadest sense of the word. The paradigm of cultivation partly provides an *explanation* of how individuals become who they are as a result of these processes – it, explains, for example how individuals become speakers of a particular language or adopters of particular attitudes and values. But the paradigm of cultivation is also an *educational programme*, that is, a way of organising education. According to this paradigm, the task of education is making sure that individuals can engage with the widest possible range of culture – or cultural ‘tools’ – in order to allow them to develop the largest number of capacities and possibilities in the fullest way possible.

There are many contemporary examples of the paradigm of cultivation – for example educational practices that seek to provide children and young people with cultural and social capital; educational practices that seek to make room for the many languages of children, their natural curiosity, their innate capacities, etcetera; or educational practices that focus strongly on providing opportunities for children and young people to flourish in the widest sense possible. I wish to suggest that a ‘paradigm case’ of this way of understanding and ‘doing’ education can be found in the work of John Dewey (1859-1952).⁸ Dewey does see education basically as a process of cultivation as can be seen, for example, in his contention that “(t)he ultimate problem of all education is to co-ordinate the psychological and the social factors” (Dewey, 1895, p. 224), that is, how individual development can ‘connect’ with social and cultural resources. It is also indicative that out of this, human individuals emerge as what

⁸ I have discussed Dewey’s work extensively in a number of publications (see, for example, Biesta 1995; 2006; 2014; Biesta & Burbules 2003). My point in discussing Dewey here is not to engage in a discussion about his work as such, but to present him as a powerful and rather ‘precise’ example of the idea of education as a process of cultivation.

Dewey refers to as ‘acculturated organisms’ (Dewey 1988, p.15); organisms who have ‘acquired’ culture and through this have become ‘encultured.’

It is interesting to see that Dewey explicitly rejects the idea that educators should determine the aims of education, suggesting that this puts external and, in a sense, artificial limits on the ways in which children become. Instead, therefore, Dewey argues that education should focus on growth and should be understood *as* growth. His argument for this is that “since growth is the characteristic of life, education is all one with growing; it has no end beyond itself” (Dewey 1985, p.58). When one reads his views on democracy from this angle it can be argued that the first and perhaps main reason why Dewey is interested in a democratic society as a society with varied interests and free interplay (see *ibid.*, p.89) is because such a society provides the optimal conditions for the growth of all individuals (for such a reading see Biesta 2016). It is, in other words, the optimal situation for cultivation.

Can we educate directly?

One interesting implication of the paradigm of cultivation that can be found in Dewey’s work has to do with his claim that it is *impossible* to educate directly, but that we can only educate “indirectly, by means of the environment” (Dewey 1985, p.23). The reason Dewey makes this claim stems from the fact that he conceives of human beings as living organisms who are in constant ‘transaction’ (Dewey’s term) with their environment. This is a process of constant ‘doing and undergoing’ – Dewey compares it with breathing, for example – in which the organism seeks to maintain an interactive balance with its environment. In this process both the organism and the environment change over time; the environment changes as a result of the actions of the organism, but the organism changes in order to adapt to the (changing) environment. Dewey refers to these changes as habits, which are not actions in themselves but ‘predispositions to act.’ While much of this goes on naturally, so we might say – in most cases we manage to adapt quickly and easily – Dewey particularly focuses on those situations in which the organism encounters a situation that calls out conflicting habits. In everyday language we might say that in those situations the organism is not sure what to do, which also means that for the organism it’s actually not clear what kind of environment it is encountering.

Dewey argues that one way to resolve this predicament is through trial-and-error. This is how we often are able to restore a smooth transaction, but the problem with trial-and-error is, of course, that we can also err, and some errors can be lethal. It is therefore important, from the perspective of the survival of the organism, to get it ‘right.’ This is where human organisms have an advantage, because they can come in the possession of symbols which allow them to ‘act without acting,’ as Dewey puts it, that is, first trying out different ways of responding *symbolically*, in imagination or thought, and then, once one has identified the most plausible or least risky way forward, to act in that way. Of course, there is still a risk that the transaction is not restored – the proof of the pudding remains in the eating – but at least the action has

become more ‘intelligent,’ as Dewey calls it, and less dependent on ‘blind’ trial-and-error. Symbols are not innate, according to Dewey, but emerge from social interaction, that is, from the ways in which human organisms try to co-ordinate their interaction. Dewey refers to such co-ordination as communication, which he defines behaviourally, as “making something in common in at least two different centres of behaviour” (Dewey 1958, p.178).

Dewey thus provides a very detailed account of the way in which human organisms become cultivated, so to speak, showing that this is an interactive process of organism and environment, not just development from within or only influences from the outside. On the one hand Dewey’s theory can be understood as a theory of reflective or intelligent problem solving aimed at restoring the transaction of organism and environment, including the transaction of organisms with other organisms. At the same time Dewey provides us with a theory of (reflective) learning. Such learning first of all takes place at the level of the body, so to speak, through the way in which organisms constantly acquire new habits, new patterns of action that are functional for the environments they are in interaction with. Yet when the human organism makes use of symbols in the process of problem solving, there is also an outcome at the level of symbols: knowledge, learning and understanding. And the reason why Dewey holds that we can never educate directly but only by means of the environment, is because, according to Dewey’s theory, the only way in which we can promote the acquisition of new habits and knowledge is by putting the human organism in new environments, as it is through interaction with such environments that human organisms acquire new habits and knowledge and hence learn.

What is missing in this picture?

Dewey thus provides a rather interesting theory of how human organisms become enculturated. What is particularly attractive about Dewey’s approach is that he doesn’t see this as a purely ‘mental’ or ‘cognitive’ process, but as something that is fully embodied, so to speak. What is also attractive about Dewey’s approach is that he doesn’t see it as a purely individual process but as a social or, to be more precise, intersubjective process, in which communication understood as the coordination of the actions of at least two organisms, plays a central role. For these reasons Dewey’s theory has, over the years, become quite popular and is still increasing in popularity.⁹ But although the theory looks quite complete and comprehensive, there is something missing. Dewey’s theory – which I have presented as a ‘paradigm case’ of the paradigm of cultivation – is a theory of intelligent adjustment to always evolving environing conditions. It is, in other words, a theory of intelligent survival. The problem I wish to highlight here, however, is that survival is not the same as life, to put it

⁹ One reason why this may be the case is that Dewey’s ideas seem to fit rather well with the nowadays often repeated idea that the world is changing so rapidly that we do no longer know what the future will look like, and hence the best thing to do in education is equip students with the skills for intelligent adaptation, so to speak. Elsewhere (Biesta 2015) I have tried to make clear what the problem which such an adaptive ‘agenda’ for education is.

briefly. Survival is not the same as human existence or it is at least not the only ‘modality’ of human existence.

While Dewey thus gives a sophisticated and detailed account of the ways in which human beings can adjust reflectively and intelligently to the situations they find themselves in, the thing that is remarkable absent in Dewey’s account is the possibility for the human organism to *refuse* such adaptation and adjustment. What is remarkably absent in Dewey’s theory, so we might say, is the possibility for the human organism to say *no* – and in the two vignettes with which I have opened this paper I have tried to make clear how important this is for our existence as human beings. We could say, therefore, that Dewey provides us with a theory of learning – and there is no doubt that Rosa Parks and Adolf Eichmann both learned – but not with a theory of education in the way in which I have presented this above, that is, as a theory that seeks to foreground the question of the ‘I’ – the ‘I’ who stands for the task of leading his or her own life, rather than just the task of securing smooth transactions with its environment. It is the ‘I’ who will sometimes say ‘yes,’ but in other situations will say ‘no’ and will have to say ‘no.’ The paradigm of cultivation is thus able to ‘explain’ Eichmann, but not Parks. This is perhaps the main blind spot, the main thing that is missing, in the paradigm of cultivation. It thus suggests the need for an altogether different educational paradigm: the paradigm of existence.

Paradigm 2: Existential education

In the line of thought presented so far, I have already indicated a number of times what the central focus of this different educational paradigm is. Very briefly we might say that this paradigm is the paradigm of the ‘I,’ where the ‘I’ is not an organism that becomes cultivated but a human individual who exists and stands for the challenge to lead his or her own life. That is why this paradigm can be characterised as an *existential* paradigm. One of the interesting things about this paradigm – which reveals that it is fundamentally different from the paradigm of cultivation – is that the ‘I’ is not the outcome of a process of cultivation and therefore not something that can be produced educationally. The ‘I,’ as Winfried Böhm puts it, is fundamentally the ‘work of the self’ (see Böhm 1997, p.199). The ‘I’ has to be its *own* ‘I,’ so to speak, and no one can do this for the ‘I.’

This doesn’t mean, however, that education has nothing to do here, but the educational work is not a matter of trying to influence or support the development of the human organism, but rather has to do with encouraging the self to be a self; encouraging the self not to walk away from itself, so to speak. Dietrich Benner, using a phrase from Johann Gottlieb Fichte, calls this ‘Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit,’ which we could translate as ‘summoning to self-action’ (see Benner 2015; see also Langewand 2003; Benner 2003). It is important to see, however, that this summoning is not the injunction to be *yourself* – which would quickly turn everything

back to the question of identity – and even less so the summoning just to become active. It rather is the injunction to be *a self*, to be an ‘I.’ In very simple terms that go to the heart of the matter, this summoning happens when we say “Hey, you there! Where are you?” – and I have shown that when Eichmann encountered this question he almost literally said “I am not here,” “It wasn’t me,” “I was only following orders”.¹⁰

This injunction, this “Hey, you there, where are you?,” is a very *direct* question. It is, in other words, an example, and perhaps even the prime example, of *direct education* that goes from ‘soul’ to ‘soul,’ so to speak (on this terminology see Biesta 2017a) rather than that it is a matter of organisms trying to adjust their actions to each other to secure ongoing successful transaction. If, from the paradigm of cultivation, such direction education is the kind of action at a distance that is considered impossible and hence can only appear as ‘spooky,’ in the existential paradigm of education such direct education, such spooky action at a distance actually goes to the heart of the matter, perhaps first of all literally.

Finding a language: *Bildung*, *Erziehung*, and the importance of a distinction

By outlining two different educational paradigms I have tried to make a distinction and, as I have tried to make clear so far, it is the distinction that matters for the theory and practice of education. The distinction is not my invention but can be found in the educational literature, albeit that not everyone makes the distinction, is sufficiently aware of it or – and this is particularly important – has words for making the distinction. It is here that there is a particular difficulty with the English language, which only has the one word ‘education,’ and something potentially interesting in the German language, where there are (at least) two words to refer to the reality of education, one being *Bildung* and the other being *Erziehung*. Whereas in recent years the idea of *Bildung* has become more visible in the English-speaking world (see, for example, Løvlie & Standish 2002; Biesta 2002; Pinar 2011; Horlacher 2017), the word *Erziehung* has remained remarkably invisible (for a recent exception see Guilherme 2019; see also Biesta 2011). It can be argued, however, that together they are the foundational concepts of German educational thought (see, for example, Benner 2015). This raised the question whether these two terms and, more importantly, the distinction that they articulate, has something to do with the two educational paradigms I have outlined above: the paradigm of education as cultivation and the existential educational paradigm.

The honest answer to this question has to be that it depends and, more specifically, that it depends on who you ask. As Benner (in press, p.46) makes clear, one of the difficulties with these terms is that even in the German context there is no agreed upon definition of the two terms and amongst German scholars there are quite different views and preferences. Some, such as for example Peter Petersen, see *Erziehung* as a rather restrictive term that refers to

¹⁰ It is, of course, interesting, that Eichmann still had to use the word ‘I’ in order to withdraw his ‘I’ from the situation. In this regard we can say that the question of the ‘I’ is not that easy to escape.

ways in which educators try to tell children what to do and how to think – close, even, to indoctrination – whereas *Bildung* is seen as a rather open process of development and (self)cultivation. Benner also refers to the views of Heinz-Joachim Heydorn, who saw *Erziehung* as reproduction of the existing social order and *Bildung* as orientated towards emancipation (see *ibid.*, pp.46-47). Benner himself provides a rather different reading of the two terms and the distinction that can be made with them (see particularly Benner in press, pp. 46-50).

Going back to Plato, Benner connects *Bildung* to the human ability to direct one's own gaze, that is, to focus one's attention on some aspect of the world. *Erziehung*, then, is the art of directing the gaze of another human being. *Bildung*, in this approach, thus has to do with our own ability to engage with the world outside of us and, to put it carefully, learn from this engagement, whereas *Erziehung* has to do with the ways in which educators can encourage children and young people to do so, that is, encouraging them to engage in their 'own' *Bildung*. This makes *Bildung* into a lifelong process that never finishes, and *Erziehung* into a process that ends at some point, namely when the child or young person no longer needs the encouragement from the outside, so to speak.

Benner's way of making the distinction thus gets closer to how I have outlined the two educational paradigms, although it seems as if in this particular reading the work of *Erziehung* is not so much the summoning to self-action in a general sense – the summoning to be an 'I,' as I have called it – as it is the summoning to engage in one's own *Bildung*, which for Benner is mainly understood as the summoning to engage in one's own *learning* (see *ibid.*). This is not entirely satisfactory, so I wish to suggest, because one could argue that both Parks and Eichmann did learn, but that the way in which their 'I' was 'connected' to or 'involved' in their learning turned out to be very different. To summon someone to be a learner is therefore not enough, and potentially even problematic from the educational point of view I am trying to articulate in this paper (see also Biesta 2013).

An author who focuses more explicitly on the question of existence – rather than reducing existence to learning – is Winfried Böhm who, in his 'Pädagogik der Person' (educational theory of the person) characterises *Bildung* as the work of the self at being a self, which would then allow for *Erziehung* to be the 'support' of and perhaps encouragement for this work (see Böhm 1997, p. 201). Böhm's work is particularly helpful because of his existential reading of the notion of 'person,' which is not the same as individual (and even less so: organism) but refers to the way in which the individual *exists* (see Böhm 2016). In my own work (see particularly Biesta 2017b) I have suggested that education – which, in German I would describe with the word *Erziehung* – is about arousing the desire in another human being for wanting to exist in the world in a grown-up way, not purely driven by one's own desires but always asking whether what one desires or encounters in oneself as a desire is what one should desire, in light of living one's life well, with others, on a planet with limited capacity

for fulfilling all our desires (see Biesta 2017b, chapter 1). This question is a radical first-person question: it is a question that ultimately each of us has to engage with for ourselves and where we should be mindful not to try to determine for others how they should answer this question, although we can encourage them not to forget the question.

Conclusion: The existential work of education

In this paper I have asked whether the prevailing description of educational reality – one that focuses on education in terms of effective instruction and successful learning, to put it briefly – can be considered complete, or whether there may be something missing. With the help of the Parks-Eichmann paradox I have tried to show that what appears as success/failure from the perspective of effective instruction and successful learning, turns into its opposite when looked at from what, perhaps a little clumsily, I have referred to as the perspective of the ‘I.’ We might say that whereas Rosa Parks inserted her ‘I’ in between what she had learned and her actions, Adolf Eichmann withdrew his ‘I’ and thus coincided with the societal order.

Through a number of steps, I have tried to argue for the importance of the latter perspective, the perspective of the ‘I,’ and have tried to argue that this perspective is absent when we think of education as cultivation – which I have taken as a general ‘paradigm’ in which notions of effective instruction and successful learning have their place. While cultivation does help human beings to acquire ‘culture’ in the broadest sense of the world, and while education can be said to have an important role to play in making this acquisition possible, I have tried to show that we need a different ‘angle,’ a different paradigm, to account for the question of the ‘I.’

Rather than seeing the ‘I’ as the outcome of the cultivation of human organisms, I have suggested, with Benner, that the question of the ‘I’ is of a different *order*: an existential rather than a bio-neuro-socio-cultural order. The ‘I,’ so we might say, breaks through this order and hence the educational work here is not that of cultivation – which will ‘only’ lead to identity – but of ‘Aufforderung,’ of ‘summoning,’ of calling.’ It is the simple but crucial gesture of the “Hey, you there! Where are you?,” which manifests itself as spooky action at a distance rather than an intervention in the acculturation of the organism. And no one can respond to this call but me, which means that it is this call that subjectivises, puts the subject-ness of the one being called ‘at stake’ (although the ‘I’ may still decide to walk away or keep silent).

This implies that the existential work of education is first and foremost *interruptive* (see Biesta 2006). It interrupts the being-with-oneself, it interrupts identity, it interrupts flourishing, it interrupts growth, it even interrupts learning. Such interruptions are not meant to destroy the self, to deny identity, to stop flourishing, to hinder growth and learning. They are meant to call the I who is trying to be, who is trying to be someone, who is trying to flourish, grow and learn *into the world*, so we might say; they are meant to call the ‘I’ into existence, bearing

in mind that it is entirely up to the 'I' to decide how to respond to the call. The work of the 'I,' after all, is ultimately and radically the work of the 'I,' that no one else can do for the 'I.'

I have argued that one of the problems with the English language is that it only has one word to refer to the reality of education, namely the word 'education,' and that this makes it difficult to keep the awareness of the need for two educational 'paradigms' into view. In this regard, as I have shown, the German tradition is in a better place since it has two key concepts to articulate the reality of education, *Bildung* and *Erziehung*. As is so often the case, the words themselves cannot do the 'work' for us, as there are differing interpretations of both words available in the literature. But the two words do act as a reminder that the reality of education is 'split,' or, put differently, that it consists of two different 'orders' – a bio-neuro-socio-cultural order and an existential order. It is this difference that matters.

This brings me to a final observation. I have developed my argument in this paper from the assumption I 'found' in the Parks-Eichmann paradox which claims that Rosa Parks stepped forward as an 'I' whereas Adolf Eichmann withdrew his 'I.' I do think that stating the paradox in this way helped to bring the missing dimension of the paradigm of education as cultivation into view, as it highlighted that what counts as success in terms of that paradigm, actually flies in the face of what we would generally see as successful and as problematic when looking at the cases of Parks and Eichmann. However, one could argue that it was not so much that Parks's 'I' was present and Eichmann's 'I' was absent, but Eichmann – or perhaps Eichmann's 'I' – was as present as the 'I' of Rosa Parks, but simply made a different choice.

Could it be, then, that we have perhaps been blinded by the fact that many (but not all) would consider what Rosa Parks did as morally right and many (but not all) would consider what Adolf Eichmann did morally wrong? Does that mean that at this more fundamental level there is actually no paradox at all? Or, more precisely, that the difference between Parks and Eichmann has nothing to do with the alleged presence or absence of their 'I' but with the moral choice they made in the situation? On that reading, which is not impossible, we would quickly end up with moral education, that is, with the attempt at making sure that children and young people acquire the right knowledge, skills and disposition and, moreover, the right moral frameworks and virtues so that the likelihood that they will choose right over wrong increases. On that reading, then, we would very quickly be back to what, in terms of this paper, we can characterise as moral *cultivation*, which is ultimately aimed at 'containing' the risk that children and young people may make wrong decisions.

If moral cultivation makes children and young people into *objects of moral education*, the line I have tried to pursue in this paper is interested in the question how children and young people may be 'called,' summoned, encouraged to become *subjects of moral action*. For the latter even to become possible, their 'I' needs to come into play, and it is this that is at stake in the existential paradigm of education. Without an 'I,' there is after all no possibility for

moral action and judgement to begin with. From this angle we can see that Eichmann did withdraw his 'I,' was happy to be object rather than subject, so that the whole question of his responsibility would never arise or would never 'meet' him. Parks, on the other hand, did bring her 'I' into play, knowing perfectly well that she would be arrested as a result of doing so, and entirely willing to take on the consequences of her actions.

Existential education is therefore not a form of moral education and definitely not a form of moralising education, but education that seeks to *bring* the 'I' of the student into play, so to speak, and *keep* the 'I' of the student into play. Jacques Rancière captures this dynamic in a very interesting way when he describes the 'call' of the 'emancipatory teacher' as one which "forbids the supposed ignorant one the satisfaction ... of admitting that one is incapable of knowing more" (Rancière 2006, p.6). Refusing students the satisfaction of being an object, of objectifying themselves, of not having to be 'there' as an 'I' is perhaps indeed the moment where existential education takes off.

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