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School-as-institution or school-as-instrument?

EDUCATIONAL THEORY

SCHOOL-AS-INSTITUTION OR SCHOOL-AS-INSTRUMENT? HOW TO OVERCOME INSTRUMENTALISM WITHOUT GIVING UP ON DEMOCRACY

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ABSTRACT. In contemporary societies, there is a strong push toward seeing education as an instrument for the delivery of particular societal agendas. On such a view, the only questions that remain are how effective education is at delivering such agendas and how its effectiveness can be increased. While this might be a desirable way forward for those who believe that a consensus about the agenda for education can easily be achieved, it is at odds with the idea that a democratic society is characterized by a fundamental plurality of visions about what schools are supposed to be for. Yet the democratic critique of educational instrumentalism cannot be confined to giving each and every vision its own school, as this would simply multiply educational instrumentalism rather than oppose it. A true democratic response thus needs to take education's own interest seriously as well, which, as Gert Biesta argues in this paper, amounts to a defense of the school as institution.

KEY WORDS. instrumentalization; school-as-institution; Talcott Parsons; C. Wright Mills; Klaus Mollenhauer; Philippe Meirieu; democracy; emancipation

ON THE SCHOOL AND SOCIETY

The question as to what the relationship between school and society should be is one of the key questions of modern education and, in a sense, also one of the key questions of modern society. According to a rather common historical account, the modern school emerged when society began to lose its "educative power." While in agricultural and pre-industrial societies it was possible for the new generation to pick up most of what they needed to know and be able to do by just "hanging around" — the technical phrase being "legitimate peripheral participation"[1] — this no longer was the case when work moved to factories and offices. The functional differentiation of society, a key aspect of societal modernization, thus necessitated the creation of the school as the institution tasked with the preparation of the new generation for their future life in society.[2] In one and the same move, the school became part of the further differentiation of society, thus creating a distinction — and some would even say a separation — between the sphere of education and the sphere of work, between preparation for life and "real" life itself, between the time of the child and the time of adulthood, and, according to some, even between the very categories of "child" and "adult."[3]

1. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

2. See Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* [The Theory of Communicative Action] (Frankfurt, Germany: Suhrkamp, 1981).

3. See Klaus Mollenhauer, *Umwege: Über Bildung, Kunst und Interaktion* [Detours: On Education, Art, and Interaction] (Weinheim, Germany: Juventa, 1986), particularly the chapter "Zur Entstehung der modernen Konzepts von Bildungszeit" [On the Emergence of the Modern Concept of Educational Time].

In sociological terms, the modern school thus appears as a function *of* society and also as an institution that has an important function to perform *for* society. More generally, we can say that the modern school stands in a *functional relationship* to society.[4] This not only means that the modern school has an important role to play vis-à-vis society. It also follows that society can have legitimate expectations about the degree to which the modern school manages to play this role successfully. The key question, however, is not so much one of efficiency and effectiveness — that is, whether the school is doing what it is supposed to be doing — but first and foremost about what it is that the school should be doing and who ought to have a voice in deciding this. It is this question that I seek to explore in this paper, acknowledging that this is not only a theoretical question about how the school's role *might be* envisaged, but also a highly political question about the way(s) in which the school *can perform* its role under actual societal conditions.

With regard to the school's role, I wish to make a distinction between two ways in which this can be understood and articulated: one to which I will refer as *school-as-institution*, and the other to which I will refer as *school-as-instrument*. Both, so I wish to emphasize, acknowledge that the school stands in a functional relationship to society, but they articulate this relationship differently. When the school is approached as an *instrument*, it is society (or particular actors within society) that sets the agenda and the terms for success, and it is left to the school to secure the effective execution of this agenda. As institution, on the other hand, the school is also "devoted to the promotion of a particular cause or program," as one definition of what institutions are puts it,[5] but in this understanding the school has an important role to play in defining and safeguarding this cause. This particularly becomes an issue in situations where what society wants from the school goes against this cause. How we envisage the relationship between school and society thus matters for the question of whether the school should be docile or "obstinate,"[6] and, therefore, to whether or not the school has not just a "duty to perform" but also a "duty to resist."[7]

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4. There is, of course, the interesting question how stable the meanings of both "society" and "school" are or can be, that is, whether and to what extent it is possible to speak about school, society, and their relationship. On this, see F. Tony Carusi and Tomasz Szkudlarek, "Education Is Society … And There Is No Society: The Ontological Turn of Education," *Policy Futures in Education* 18, no. 7 (2020): 907–921.

5. *Dictionary.com*, "institution," noun, accessed February 4, 2022, https://www.dictionary.com/browse/institution.

6. See Gert Biesta, *Obstinate Education: Reconnecting School and Society* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2019).

7. Philippe Meirieu, *Pédagogie: Le devoir de résister* [Education: The Duty to Resist] (Issy-les-Moulineaux, France: ESF éditeur, 2007).

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CREEPING INSTRUMENTALISM: ON THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

One area where the difference between school-as-institution and school-as-instrument becomes clearly visible is in the discourse about the quality of education. "Quality" may not just be one of the most commonly used words in contemporary education; it may also be one of the most misused and even abused words. After all, no one is *against* quality, but opinions about what counts as quality differ widely, so that just to say that one "aims for quality" or that schools should be of "high quality" or even of "world-class quality" actually says very little, if it says anything at all.

The emptiness of the word "quality" is particularly visible in the quality management industry that has emerged over the past decades. Here, quality is predominantly defined in terms of compliance with certain standards, including standards for quality management itself (see, for example, the influential ISO 9000 quality management standards). One risk with such an approach is that most energy goes to meeting the standards and providing evidence that certain standards have been met and, consequently, questions about whether the standards themselves are meaningful quickly move to the background.[8]

This risk is also there when so-called "customer needs" become the main point of reference for defining quality, as in the case of the first "quality management principle" of ISO 9000, which reads: "Organizations depend on their customers and therefore should understand current and future customer needs, should meet customer requirements and strive to exceed customer expectations."[9]

After all, what customers *say* that they need is not automatically also what customers actually need. This is already a problem in commercial settings, as much of what customers say they need is actually "produced" by an advertising industry that constantly suggests new "needs" to customers. But it becomes even more of an issue when the reference to "customer needs" moves into other domains, such as medicine or education, where one could argue that the whole point of the work in such domains is to figure out what "customers," if that's the right word, may or may not need.[10] And it is precisely because of the pressure to give customers what they want that institutions are increasingly pushed toward instrumentalism.

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8. Onara O'Neill, *A Question of Trust: The BBC Reith Lectures 2002* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

9. See International Organization for Standardization, *Quality Management Principles* (Geneva, Switzerland: ISO, 2015), http://www.iso.org/iso/pub100080.pdf.

10. See, for example, Lynne Eagle and Ross Brennan, "Are Students Customers? TQM and Marketing Perspectives," *Quality Assurance in Education* 15, no. 1 (2007): 44–60; Elizabeth Nixon, Richard Scullion, and Robert Hearn, "Her Majesty the Student: Marketised Higher Education and the Narcissistic (Dis)satisfactions of the Student-Consumer," *Studies in Higher Education* 43, no. 6 (2018): 927–943; and Walter Feinberg, "Choice, Autonomy, Need-definition, and Educational Reform," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 20, no. 5 (2001): 402–409.

Such an instrumental orientation is also visible in the issue of "performativity,"[11] where *operationalizations* of quality are taken for *definitions* of quality. This is, for example, the case when organizations define their quality ambitions in terms of a position in a league table and gear all their efforts toward achieving this position.[12]

We can see, therefore, that in the discourse about quality *in* education and the quality *of* education, there is a "creeping instrumentalism" that, in the very name of "quality," increasingly transforms educational institutions into instruments as a result of the combined effect of internal dynamics and external pressures. The question this raises, then, is how schools and other educational institutions can navigate these complex dynamics. For an answer to this question, I turn to the work of the German educational scholar Klaus Mollenhauer.

On the Functionality and Dysfunctionality of Education

While there is a strong tendency in educational policy and practice to continuously pursue the improvement of how education functions, Mollenhauer enters the discussion from the opposite end of the spectrum by asking how we should understand the *dysfunctionality* of education, that is, the situation where education precisely is *not* addressing the needs from "elsewhere," to put it briefly.[13] Should we see this as a problem that needs to be solved, or might it be the case that the dysfunctionality of education vis-à-vis its environing societal context reveals something important about education's own cause?

One argument that supports the "societal dysfunctionality" of education, so Mollenhauer argues, is already visible in the work of authors such as Rousseau, Schleiermacher, and Condorcet.[14] Central in their work is the idea that education can never just be about the insertion of the new generation into the existing social order — education as adaptation — but it also has a role to play in helping children and young people to find their own position in society — education as emancipation.[15] This means that education can never concern itself just with qualification (the presentation and acquisition of knowledge and skills) and socialization (the presentation of and introduction into existing traditions and

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11. See Stephen Ball, "The Teacher's Soul and the Terrors of Performativity," *Journal of Education Policy* 18, no. 2 (2003): 215–228; and Dennis Gleeson and Chris Husbands, eds., *The Performing School: Managing, Teaching, and Learning in a Performance Culture* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2001).

12. See Gert Biesta, "Resisting the Seduction of the Global Education Measurement Industry: Notes on the Social Psychology of PISA," *Ethics and Education* 10, no. 3 (2015): 348–360, DOI:10.1080/17449642.2015.1106030.

13. See Klaus Mollenhauer, *Erziehung und Emanzipation. 6. Auflage* [Education and Emancipation, 6th ed.] (Munich, Germany: Juventa, 1973).

14. Ibid., 26–27.

15. Ibid., 22–23.

practices), but it must also always be oriented toward subjectification, that is, to the ways in which students can come to exist as subjects in their own right.[16]

From this angle, education is not just there to secure the continuation of the past and the present, but it needs to be oriented toward the future as well, particularly with the intention to keep the future "open" for the new generation rather than to determine their future and, in doing so, determine the new generation itself as well. What is interesting — and in a sense ironic — is that this dysfunctional "moment" in education is often justified in functional terms by arguing that keeping the future open for the next generation and, perhaps, keeping the next generation open toward their future, is important for the renewal of society itself. This is the point John Dewey makes in the opening chapters of *Democracy and Education*, where he not only sets out a case for understanding education as "a necessity of life" (the title of chapter 1), but also for education as "a social function" (the title of chapter 2).[17]

Mollenhauer does indeed show that this is an important line of thinking in modern views about education as they emerged from the end of the eighteenth century onward. However, in addition to such a functional justification, there is always also the argument for the intrinsic worth of the "being-subject" of children and young people. Along this line, then, the modern educational "project" emerges as an *emancipatory* project in which the next generation is not simply seen as a "recruitment pool" for society, as Mollenhauer puts it.[18]

The powerful sentences with which Hannah Arendt concludes her essay "The Crisis of Education" bring these two arguments — education as a social function and education for the sake of the future life of each child and young person — together rather well:

> Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world.[19]

Mollenhauer's analysis of the functional and dysfunctional "manifestations" of education goes even further than this, particularly because he warns against a "romantic" view in which a choice in favor of the child would be taken as a choice *against* society. The danger with such a view, so Mollenhauer argues,

16. See Gert Biesta, "What Is Education For? On Good Education, Teacher Judgement, and Educational Professionalism," *European Journal of Education* 50, no. 1 (2015): 75–87; and Gert Biesta, "Risking Ourselves in Education: Qualification, Socialization, and Subjectification Revisited," *Educational Theory* 70, no. 1 (2020): 89–104.

17. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916).

18. Mollenhauer, *Erziehung und Emanzipation*, 24.

19. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1977), 196.

is that it isolates education from society and thus thinks of emancipation as something entirely focused on individual children, without paying attention to societal dynamics. In his view, this disconnection of education from society — known in the literature as the creation of an educational "province" — was the main problem with German educational thought and practice in the first decades of the twentieth century. According to Mollenhauer, it made education vulnerable for ideological "take over," which is exactly what happened with education in Germany during the rise of Nazism.

Mollenhauer concludes, therefore, that with regard to the relationship between education and society, the question is not how we can *protect* education from society, but how we should understand the relationship between the two, if, that is, we do not want to think of this relationship in purely functional terms — what, above, I have referred to as education-as-instrument — but also do not want to disconnect education from society. In order to address this question, Mollenhauer turns to social theory, arguing that the question of the relationship between school and society is not just a matter for educational theory but also requires an analysis of our understanding of society.

Education, Social Theory, and Democracy

Mollenhauer starts his analysis with Talcott Parsons's structural-functionalist approach in which functional processes are those that contribute to the stability of social systems, whereas dysfunctional processes are those that undermine or obstruct the integration and effectiveness of a social system.[20] Parsons's views follow from his views about social stability, where he argues that social stability should be understood as the *result* of a shared system of values.[21] This means, so Mollenhauer explains, that for Parsons social stability *requires consensus* and also *appears as consensus*. This, in turn, implies that anything that threatens or undermines consensus is a problem that needs to be solved with an eye to maintaining or reestablishing social stability. Mollenhauer highlights that in such a view of the dynamics of society, plurality and disagreement appear as dysfunctional "elements" that threaten the stability of society.

Mollenhauer not only shows how this way of thinking lies at the heart of discussions about education itself, particularly in education policy documents that call upon education to contribute to social cohesion and integration[22] — a major line of thought in contemporary discussions about citizenship education.[23] He also highlights the influence of structural-functionalism on views about educational research that highlight the need for such research to continuously improve the

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20. Mollenhauer, *Erziehung und Emanzipation*, 28.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., 28–29.

23. See, for example, Wiel Veugelers, Isolde de Groot, and Vincent Stolk, *Teaching Common Values in Europe* (Brussels, Belgium: European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, 2017).

effectiveness and efficiency of the education system.[24] Dysfunctional dimensions of education either are not thematized in such research or, more frequently, are seen as the problems for which research needs to find a solution.[25] Mollenhauer also notes that the functional approach to education and educational research is visible in the use of particular concepts such as "achievement" and "outcome."[26]

Just as Mollenhauer sheds light on the functionality and dysfunctionality of education, he also shows that society itself can be viewed either through a functional or a dysfunctional lens. Where Talcott Parsons highlights the functional line of thought — arguing that dysfunctional "elements" are a threat to social stability — C. Wright Mills provides a rather different view, in which he does *not* start from the assumption that the stability of social systems is a result of shared values. In his view plurality — plurality of values, in particular — and conflict are not to be seen as problematic exceptions to the normal situation, but rather as part of society's normality. Plurality and conflict, in other words, should not be viewed as problems that must be solved but instead as part and parcel of what (a) society *is*.

Mollenhauer argues that this also shows that the suggestion that society is only possible on the basis of value consensus is an ideological view of society that largely is at odds with the idea of society as a *democratic* society.[27] The word "largely" is important here, because a democratic society is not value-free but can be seen as the expression of a particular set of political values — those of freedom, equality, and solidarity — notwithstanding that in democratic societies what such values mean in practice is an ongoing matter of debate.[28] This implies, so Mollenhauer argues, that plurality and conflict should not be seen as distortions of the "proper" functioning of education, but rather as integral to it.[29]

This outlook has important implications for our understanding of the practice of education — and forty-five years after the publication of Mollenhauer's essay, we can only conclude that plurality has become an even more influential part of the everyday reality of schools. Moreover, it has important implications for educational research, because, so Mollenhauer argues, such research can no longer start from the assumption of a stable, homogenous society that would have a clear and unambiguous view of what school should be about, and also can no longer operate with a utopian idea of the school, that is, a school that perfectly "produces"

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24. See Gert Biesta, "Improving Education through Research? From Effectiveness, Causality, and Technology to Purpose, Complexity, and Culture," *Policy Futures in Education* 14, no. 2 (2016): 194–210, DOI: 10.1177/1478210315613900.

25. See Mollenhauer, *Erziehung und Emanzipation*, 29.

26. Ibid., 29–30.

27. Ibid., 30–31.

28. On this, see Chantal Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy and Agonistic Pluralism* (Vienna, Austria: Institute for Advanced Studies, 2000); and Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005).

29. Mollenhauer, *Erziehung und Emanzipation*, 31.

such a view.[30] Mollenhauer suggests that education in schools and other settings should instead be understood in terms of the interaction between a "multiplicity of fields."[31] And he argues that conflict and antagonism, particularly with regard to the question of education's "agenda," are not dysfunctional moments of an otherwise functioning system, but should rather be seen as *constitutive* of educational practice.[32]

Through all this Mollenhauer reveals two important shortcomings of an entirely functional — or, in my terms, an entirely instrumental — view of the relationship between education and society. Or, to put it slight differently, he provides us with two arguments for seeing that what, from a consensus point of view, can only be seen as *dys*functionality and hence as a problem, can actually appear as something positive. The first argument is educational and highlights that education can never be confined to adapting children and young people to the existing societal order but needs to have an orientation toward their independence — which is education as emancipation. The second argument concerns our understanding of society and highlights the importance of understanding society in terms of plurality and antagonism and not in terms of unity and consensus — which is the question of democracy.

Along these lines Mollenhauer provides an interesting argument against the instrumentalization of education, because one could argue — and this is implied in how Mollenhauer proceeds — that educational instrumentalism is only possible if there is a clear "agenda" for education to implement, a clear consensus about what education is supposed to achieve. Mollenhauer rather argues for plurality, that is, for a "multiplicity of fields" around education, which he does first and foremost from the perspective of social theory and, more specifically, from the perspective of a *democratic* view of society. The question that remains implicit in Mollenhauer's argument is whether education itself should have a voice in this "multiplicity of fields," and if so, what this voice might be and how it can be justified. Otherwise, there is a real chance that even under democratic conditions education ends up as an instrument rather than existing as an institution. So how, then, might we articulate education's own concern? For an answer to this question, I turn to the French educational scholar Philippe Meirieu.

Education's Duty to Resist

Meirieu approaches the question of the relationship between education and society from an explicit educational perspective, making a case for education's duty to offer resistance to what society wants from education, at least when such wants run the risk of undermining education's "own" concern.[33] Although his argument is first of all educational, it also has important implications for the school as a

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30. Ibid., 35.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Meirieu, *Pédagogie*.

democratic institution — not just for the school as an institution *of* democracy (which always runs the risk of instrumentalization), but also for the school as an institution *for* democracy, that is, for the school as an important condition of possibility of democracy. [34]

In Meirieu's work, the suggestion that the school has a duty to resist society's desires is not meant as an argument for the construction of what, above, I have referred to as an educational "province," an educational space that is sheltered from society so that children can freely develop and develop in freedom, that is, without any external "interference." The "duty to resist," as Meirieu calls it, follows from the idea that education is never about the free development of children and young people but rather about what in my own work I have referred to as their "grown-up" existence. [35]

Grown-up-ness, to use an awkward but nonetheless accurate term, is not the question of identity — this is the question of *who* I am, which is located in the domain of socialization — but concerns the question of subject-ness, of existing as subject. This, so we might say, is the question of *how* I am, that is, the question of how I try to relate to and coexist with the world external to me. Whereas an infantile or non-grown-up way of being in the world is egocentric or "egological"[36] in that it takes the self and its desires as its point of reference, a grown-up way of trying to be in the world is oriented toward an existence with what and who is other in such a way that both self and other can exist. Meirieu refers to this way of being as a "dialectical" relationship with what is other.[37] In my own work I have described it as wanting-to-be-in-dialogue-with, emphasizing that dialogue is not to be understood as conversation but as an existential form.[38]

Along these lines Meirieu suggests that the central task of education is to make the existence of the individual as subject possible. In the context of the school, he speaks about "installing" the subject "in" the pupil (*instituer le sujet dans l'élève*).[39] The "pupil-as-subject" (*élève-sujet*), so Meirieu argues, is capable of being *in* the world without positioning itself *in the center* of the world.[40] It is this mode of de-centered existence that we might refer to as a grown-up way of being in

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34. Ibid., 123. See also Philippe Meirieu, *Ce que l'école peut encore pour la démocratie* [What the School Still Can Do for Democracy] (Paris: Autrement, 2020).

35. Gert Biesta, *The Rediscovery of Teaching* (London/New York: Routledge, 2017).

36. On this term, see Gert Biesta, "The Three Gifts of Teaching: Towards a Non-Egological Future for Moral Education," *Journal of Moral Education* 50, no. 1 (2021): 39–54, https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2020.1763279.

37. Meirieu, *Pédagogie*, 12.

38. See Gert Biesta, "The Educational Significance of the Experience of Resistance: Schooling and the Dialogue between Child and World," *Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives* 1, no. 1 (2012): 92–103.

39. Meirieu, *Pédagogie*, 114.

40. Ibid., 96.

and with the world. Education oriented toward grown-up ways of being in and with the world is therefore not aimed at the development of the child's talents or the realization of the child's "full potential," but appears in the form of interruption.[41] More specifically, it appears as the interruption of egocentric or egological ways of being-in-the-world that, strictly speaking, are not at all ways of being-in-the-world.

Meirieu describes the educational "work" that is required here as that of helping children to disconnect themselves from the logic of whims (*la logique du caprice*).[42] It is about enabling the interrogation of wants and desires through questioning which of those desires are desirable for the child's own life and the life it seeks to lead with others (the question of democracy) on a planet with limited capacity for providing everything that is desired from it (the ecological question). What is at stake here is not the suppression of desires, but the selection and transformation of existing desires into those that can support living well, individually and collectively.[43]

Education, Resistance, and Democracy

The theme of resistance plays a double role in this dynamic. It first of all plays a role in the interaction between child and world. When the child takes initiative and initiates action, it will, at some point, encounter resistance, both from the physical and the natural world, but also from the social world. The experience of resistance is tremendously important because it reveals that the world is not a construction but exists independently and has its own integrity. Resistance can be a frustrating experience, particularly when we encounter it in our attempts to bring our own initiatives and ideas into the world. One way to respond to the frustration of encountering resistance is by trying to overcome the source of such resistance — by trying to push hard, literally or figuratively. Pushing in order to bring our initiatives into the world is important, of course, but there is a danger that if we push too hard, we may begin to destroy the very world in which our initiatives try to arrive and in which we try to arrive. At one end of the spectrum, then, there is always the risk of world-destruction.

The frustrating encounter with resistance can, however, also make us go in the opposite direction, causing us to conclude that the world is too difficult, that it's not worth the effort, and so on. While sometimes this response is important as well, particularly in order to make room for the world, natural and social, there is a risk that if we go too far in that direction, we withdraw ourselves from the very world in which we seek to arrive. At this end of the spectrum, we find the risk of self-destruction, which is first and foremost about destroying the opportunities for trying to arrive in the world but can also be about one's total withdrawal

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41. See Gert Biesta, *Beyond Learning: Democratic Education for a Human Future* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2006).

42. Meirieu, *Pédagogie*, 13.

43. Spivak uses the interesting expression "uncoercive rearrangement of desires" as her definition of what education is and what it is about. See Gayatri Spivak, "Righting the Wrongs," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, no. 2–3 (2004): 526.

from the world. This suggests that the grown-up alternative lies somewhere in between the extremes of world-destruction and self-destruction and thus entails an orientation toward establishing a *relationship* with what and who is other, rather than attempting to overpower what one encounters there or simply walking away from it.[44]

The educational work, then, if it is aimed at making grown-up ways of being in and with the world possible, needs to work with resistance, not just by offering resistance to infantile and egological ways of doing and being, but also by providing ways in which children can "work through" the encounter with resistance and by supporting them to stay in the difficult "middle ground" between world-destruction and self-destruction — the middle ground where grown-up *co*-existence with what and how is other takes place.

Education's duty to resist is, however, not confined to the interaction between educators and children, but also takes place at the level of the relationship between school and society. The point here is not that the school should object to everything that comes to it from the outside — which would be the naïve idea of the educational "province," completely *dis*connected from society. But the school has a duty to resist expectations that would undermine its educational orientation toward the grown-up existence of children and young people in and with the world. This also means that it has a duty to resist any attempt at making the school into a perfect instrument for what society, or individuals or groups within society, wants from it. As Meirieu has observed, the expectation that the school can become such a perfectly functioning instrument is actually itself infantile, as it denies the reality of the school itself; it denies the fact that the school is not a machine but a thoroughly human endeavor, and it denies the fact that the school's own concern is a concern for the grown-up existence of children and young people as subjects of their own life, not as objects of what others would want from them.

All this also points to the question of democracy, if, that is, we do not understand democracy as the mere expression and maximization of (individual and group) desires, but rather as a deliberative process in which the central challenge is to come to a settlement about the extent to which and the way in which desires from individuals and groups can be "carried" collectively.[45] Democracy, to put it differently, also requires grown-up ways of trying to coexist with what and who is other.

Concluding Comments

In the preceding pages I have explored the relationship between the school and society in light of concerns about the instrumentalization of education, that is,

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44. Biesta, *The Rediscovery of Teaching*.

45. Gert Biesta, "D is for Democracy: Critical Education between Inclusion and Interruption," in *The Possibility/Impossibility of a New Critical Language in Education*, ed. Ilan Gur-Ze'ev (Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense, 2010).

the situation where the school is an instrument and nothing but an instrument for what society wants from it. The traditional argument against such a positioning of the school stems from the idea that education can never just be a matter of adaptation to the existing societal order. The modern educational tradition from Rousseau onward has argued that education also has a role to play in, and a concern to have for, the subject-ness of the child or student, that is, their chance at existing as the subject of their own life and not as the object of what others may want from them. From the perspective of society, this already introduces a dysfunctional "moment" in its relationship with the school.

Traditionally, this has been taken as an argument for the creation of an educational "province," that is, an educational realm entirely disconnected from the demands, desires, and influences that come from society. Mollenhauer convincingly shows, however, how the construction of such an educational province runs the risk of making education politically naive, which became a serious problem for German educational thought and practice with the rise of Nazism. This is one reason why, throughout his career, Mollenhauer has insisted that there cannot be individual emancipation without societal emancipation.

Against this background, I have explored whether the relationship between school and society can be understood in terms other than those either of 100 percent functionality — the school as pure instrument — or of 100 percent dysfunctionality — the school disconnected from society. One interesting thing about Mollenhauer's analysis is that he shows that both educational functionalism and educational dysfunctionality seem to be connected to a homogeneous vision of society, that is, a view of society that is based on consensus. Against such a view, Mollenhauer makes a case for seeing plurality and conflict as part of societal "normality," rather than as dimensions that undermine social stability and the existence of society itself. Along these lines Mollenhauer is able to show that what appears as dysfunctionality from the perspective of a homogeneous society is actually entirely appropriate from the perspective of a democratic society characterized by an irreducible plurality of values and visions, including visions about education.

While Mollenhauer's analysis is extremely helpful in exposing the democratic deficit of both educational and societal functionalism, there remains the question of whether his plea for the interaction between a "multiplicity of fields" in and around education is a sufficiently robust response to this deficit. By characterizing democracy in terms of plurality and conflict, and by making a case for "multiplicity," Mollenhauer seems to suggest that the democratic option is the one where many individuals and groups within a society can have a say in what they want from education, even to the point where many individuals and groups within a society can have their "own" education. The problem with such a reading of the essence of a democratic relationship between the school and society, however, is that it would quickly return the school to an instrument — not the instrument of one "grand" vision of education, but definitely the instrument for many "smaller" visions of what education should be.

This is why it remains important to see that there are two ways in which the school can be in a functional relationship with society, either as instrument or as institution. And herein lies the significance of the final step of my argument, where I have tried to make the case that the school is not a neutral vehicle for anything that others want from it, but has its "own" concern, which is a concern for the grown-up existence of the new generation in and with the world. What is interesting about this concern is that it is not "just" a proper educational concern, but that it is at the very same time a key democratic concern. This, in turn, means that education's "own" concern ought to be the concern of every society that claims to be democratic — that is, of every society that claims to value a multiplicity of views and values, even when they are in conflict, to use Mollenhauer's term.

I conclude that while the ongoing instrumentalization of education is deeply problematic, both from an educational and from a democratic point of view, overcoming such instrumentalization is not as easy as it may seem. After all, a total rejection of instrumentalism runs the risk of withdrawing into an educational province where education becomes disconnected from democratic concerns. But giving a place to such concerns, without any sense of education's "own" concern, runs the risk of letting instrumentalism in via the backdoor, by making education subservient to a plurality of visions about what it ought to be. The "third way" that I have tried to articulate in this paper attempts to stay away from these two problematic options by showing that it is precisely by taking care of its "own" concern that education can remain an important force for any society that claims to be a democratic society.