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THE INTEGRITY OF EDUCATION AND THE FUTURE OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

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ABSTRACT: *In this paper, based on an invited keynote given at the 2022 Colloquium of the Society for Educational Studies, I explore the question of the integrity of educational studies. I ask is whether educational studies in their current configuration are able to offer resistance to the instrumentalisation of education and the push towards empirical research that is only interested in finding out what works, but is unable to engage with this question in a properly educational way. Through a reconstruction of the history of educational studies in the English-speaking world, I show how educational studies are predominantly configured as an 'applied field'. The problem with this configuration is that educational studies lack the resources for generating educational questions about and an educational perspective on education. I show why this is a problem, also in relation to ongoing misunderstandings and misrepresentations of education. In the final part of the paper I outline two approaches, one focusing on educational concepts and one highlighting the unique and distinctive form of education, that may help to build a stronger identity for educational studies. I see this as a major challenge for the future of educational studies in the English-speaking world.*

Keywords: educational studies, discipline of education, applied field, integrity of education, autonomy of educational studies, history of educational studies

1. INTRODUCTION: THE INTEGRITY OF EDUCATION

Questions about the quality of education are at the forefront of discussions amongst politicians, policy makers, parents, teachers, students, the media and the wider public in almost all countries around the world. There are ongoing discussions about the quality of what happens in schools, colleges and universities. Such discussions are often characterised by a high degree of panic about declining standards and declining performance. There are also ongoing discussions about what counts or should count as quality in education. In these discussions we can, on the one hand, see arguments for rather narrow agendas, such as in the idea that education should focus on workforce development and economic productivity, on social cohesion and

national values, or even simply on securing a high position in league tables. At the same time, and partly in response to this, arguments are being put forward for broader agendas, such as in the idea that education should focus on human flourishing and well-being, on social justice and democracy, on sustainability and peace, or on the delivery of the United Nation's sustainable development goals.

While the latter ambitions are often seen as more sympathetic and humane, it could be argued that in both cases education *itself* – which is first of all the work done by teachers and students – is only seen as an instrument for the delivery of particular agendas, irrespective of how narrow or broad, how economic or humanistic these agendas are. The instrumentalisation of education is, therefore, not just a problem with regard to those who seek to subject schools, colleges and universities to neo-liberal agenda setting and the logic of the global measurement industry (Ball, 2012; Biesta, 2015a, 2022a; Carusi, 2022; D'Agnese, 2017; Ravitch, 2011). Those who seek to pursue more benign agendas also run the risk of treating education as an instrument for their ambitions, thus ending up with similar questions about efficiency and effectiveness, but with little concern for what in this paper I will refer to as the integrity of education itself. This makes it difficult for educators to resist the pressure from such agendas when they feel that this integrity is being threatened (see also Biesta, 2019a; Meirieu, 2007).

The question of the integrity of education which, as I will argue in this paper, is also the question of the integrity of educational studies, is not new. My own 'youthful' attempt to stand up for education (Biesta and Säfström, 2011) is part of a much longer history and can even be seen as a foundational concern for the field. In Germany, Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841), one of the founding figures of the academic study of education, warned already long ago about the danger of education becoming a 'colonised province' ('eroberte Provinz') ruled from elsewhere (see Herbart, [1806] 1893, p. 130). He strongly argued for the intellectual, practical and political integrity of education and the study of education (see Matthes, 2018). Herbart sought to secure the integrity of education with recourse to education's proper concepts ('einheimische Begriffe'), that is, concepts which are both distinctive of and unique for education. With regard to this, he suggested 'Bildsamkeit,' that is, the idea that human beings are 'educable' beings, and 'Unterricht,' that is, teaching (see also Prange, 2009).

In this paper I explore the case for the integrity of education and the integrity of educational studies, on the assumption that if educators, educationalists and education scholars don't have a sense of what is unique about and distinctive of their field and practice, they continue running the risk of being governed by forces that may miss the very 'point' of what education is about. They continue running the risk, in other words, that education is being *undermined* (for this term see Ravitch, 2011) by forces from 'elsewhere. I develop my argument in three steps.

I will first look at the history of educational studies in the UK and its connections with educational studies in the US. I will argue that in the very structure of its configuration educational studies in the English-speaking world still is what Herbart would see as a 'colonised province.' The missing element in this configuration, so I will suggest in the second step, is proper educational theory. I will show why such theory is needed, why its status is precarious and why, in contemporary educational research, there appears to be an ongoing misunderstanding of education. In the third step I will provide two building blocks for the development of educational theory, one which, in line with Herbart, focusses on key educational concepts and one which, contrary to Herbert, focuses on the unique and distinctive form of education. I conclude with a number of observations about the future of educational studies.

2. RECONSTRUCTING THE HISTORY OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

2.1.   The History of Educational Studies (1): The United Kingdom

In the UK the field of educational studies mainly developed in the context of teacher education. While teacher education was initially strongly practice-based, more theoretical strands began to emerge around the turn of the 19th century (see Tibble, 1966a). These included the study of method, the history of education and, increasingly, educational psychology, a field which became more firmly established as a subject of study in the 1920s. Sociology and philosophy only gained prominence from the late 1950s/early 1960s onwards (see McCulloch, 2002). Until the Second World War there were two routes into teaching (see Hirst, 2008 whose account I closely follow here). One was to study in a university for a bachelor's degree in a relevant curriculum subject and then take a one year course at a University Department of Education for a Post-Graduate Certificate in Education. The other was to train at a College of Education for three years taking a combined course of academic studies in a curriculum subject plus practical training, leading to the College's own Certification in Education.

Two important things happened after the Second World War. The McNair Report (Board of Education, 1944) recommended that every College of Education should be brought under the supervision of a local university, each major university establishing for that purpose an Institute of Education for the Colleges under its area. The Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education, 1963), which focused on the whole provision of Higher Education in the UK, recommended that all the Colleges of Education should redevelop their courses in arrangement with local universities so that all three-year students would be awarded an Ordinary Bachelor of Education degree and students taking a fourth year would go on to receive an Honours Bachelor of Education degree. The aim was to create eventually an all graduate profession

of schoolteachers. As a result of this, teacher education became strongly connected to and eventually (almost) fully integrated into the university sector, albeit not in all cases wholeheartedly (see Richardson, 2002, p. 16). Yet these developments inevitably raised questions about the academic status and identity of teacher education and of the 'field' of education more generally.

While in principle the focus could have been on innovative ways to develop teacher education as a form of professional education, the road taken was one in which the 'academic, university interest' (Richardson, 2002, p. 18) prevailed. According to Richardson (2002) a key-figure in this development was R.S. Peters. His inaugural lecture at the University of London Institute of Education – a lecture which Richardson characterises as a 'pre-emptive strike' (Richardson, 2002, p. 18) – was given six weeks after the publication of the Robbins Report. Richardson suggests that by focusing on the theme of education as initiation, Peters was able to discuss 'both the education of children and of those intending to teach them' (Richardson, 2002, p. 18). With regard to the latter Peters defended the view that conceptual clarification within educational studies was 'pre-eminently the task of a philosopher of education,' which led him to propose 'that the field should comprise a balance among the disciplinary perspectives competing for attention: economics, sociology and psychology' (Richardson, 2002, p. 18). Moreover, 'to ensure teachers escaped the threat of "conceptual blight," philosophers would need to adjudicate among these disciplines in order to establish the basis of a coherent concept of education' (Richardson, 2002, p. 18; see also Peters, 1963).

Peters' outline of *a possible* structure for the field of educational studies was met with approval by officials from the Department of Education and Science, and by C.J. Gill, the Chief Inspector responsible for the education of teachers in England (see Richardson, 2002, p. 18). This led to the convening by the Department of a closed seminar held in Hull in 1964 at which selected professors of education from England, led by Peters and with guidance from Gill, 'hammered out the structure within which educational studies in England and Wales would expand and develop over the coming two decades' (Richardson, 2002, p. 18). In the event economics was relegated in favour of history 'which now joined philosophy, psychology and sociology in a quarter of "foundation disciplines" defining the scope and nature of teaching and much research in the field' (Richardson, 2002, p. 18).

In one sense one might say that it was this single event that led to the particular construction of the field of educational studies in the UK as a multidisciplinary field of study based on input from a number of academic disciplines. While Brian Simon has suggested that Peters' intervention 'simply crystallized contemporary developments in the field' (Simon, quoted in Richardson, 2002, p. 18), it doesn't do away with the fact that Peters was able to seize the opportunity. It also doesn't do away with the fact that Peters'

intervention has been hugely influential for the further development of educational studies in the English-speaking world. While it could be argued, therefore, that Peters simply consolidated an approach that was already 'in the air,' there is still the interesting question where he got his outlook from. A case can be made that Peters' exposure to developments in the USA played an important role in this.

2.2. The History of Educational Studies (2): The USA

In a sense the developments in the field of teacher education in the USA are quite similar to those in Britain. As Waks (2008) makes clear, teacher education before the mid-twentieth century mainly took place in normal schools or teacher colleges, but rarely in university. In the 1940s American normal schools were converted into teachers colleges, and in the 1960s these were converted into state universities. For the first time, then, 'schoolteachers required a proper university education' (Waks, 2008, p. 1). Waks credits James Conant, president of Harvard, with envisioning 'a new kind of university-based school of education, drawing scholars from mainstream academic disciplines such as history, sociology, psychology and philosophy, to teach prospective teachers, conduct educational research, and train future educational scholars' (Waks, 2008, p. 1).

Funded by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation these ideas were put into practice through the appointment, in 1952, of the philosopher Israel Scheffler and the historian Bernard Bailyn to Harvard's Graduate School of Education as part of a deliberate attempt to introduce 'young scholars ... who had not been trained in the field of Education but in the Liberal Arts subjects' (Scheffler, 2008, p. xi). Scheffler not only started to connect analytic philosophy with education thus inaugurating the development of an 'analytical revolution in the philosophy of education' (Waks, 2008). He also lays claim to having turned Richard Peters into a philosopher of education. Here is Scheffler's own (obviously coloured) account of this.

> My first sabbatical took me to London in 1958 and 1959, where, at a meeting of the Aristotelian Society, I for the first time met Richard Peters, then teaching at Birkbeck College. Before coming to London I had read three of his lectures published in *The Listener*, entitled Authority, Responsibility and Education. (...) I had much admired those lectures for their clarity, wisdom and philosophical acumen, and was delighted to meet the author, hastening to tell him that he was, in fact, now a philosopher of education. He bristled at my description, insisting on his identity as a philosopher of psychology, and of political theory. (...) Shortly after I returned home, my Dean asked me to meet with an official of the Rockefeller Foundation who was in town and wanted to talk with me. He asked me for my advice on what the Foundation might do to help improve the humanistic offerings of the School of Education. I conveyed both to him and to my Dean the strong recommendation that they invite Richard Peters to come

as a Visiting Professor to the School of education for an extended period, to teach philosophy of education in my Area. Thus my definition of his identity as philosopher of education was realized, at Harvard at least. He did in fact come, and I asked him to teach his own version of my Introduction to Philosophy of Education course, the focus of which was epistemology; he agreed and designed his course to address ethics and education. (. . .) Sometime later, after Professor Louis Arnaud Reid's leaving the Chair of Philosophy at the Institute of Education in London, I was invited to write a letter to the authorities there concerning Peters' candidacy for the Chair. This I was only glad to do, and I was overjoyed that he was in fact appointed to that position, cementing his identification as philosopher of education on both sides of the Atlantic and, allied with Paul Hirst and others, leading the reform of Education in the U.K. with brilliant results. (Scheffler, 2008, pp. xiv-xv)

Scheffler's account provides an interesting insight into the way in which Richard Peters developed his identity as a philosopher of education. What is perhaps even more important for the line I am pursuing in this paper, is the fact that he 'found' this identity in a context in which the study of education was explicitly and intentionally being developed along multidisciplinary lines and as an applied field of study, that is, according to the model that became prominent in Britain from the 1960s onwards.

That this was not just a 'local' matter of Peters just being exposed to the idiosyncrasies of the particular approach to the study of education taken at Harvard, can be glanced from the fact that in the early 1960s the very same James Conant led a two-year study of teacher education, financed by the Carnegie Corporation and resulting in a report *The Education of American Teachers* (Conant, 1963). The report was highly influential for the development of teacher education in the USA and did indeed put forward the case for the configuration of educational studies and the education of teachers as being based on the input from 'proper' academic disciplines. The Conant report concluded that 'effective teaching of academic content in education could only come from properly trained professors bringing to bear on educational topics the best, most current methods from well-established academic disciplines' (Waks, 2008, p. 3). And the point here was not only to bring such a disciplinary perspective to the study of education, but at the very same time 'to free teachers from domination by educationists' (Waks, 2008, p. 3).

2.3.   What If?

While this is only part of a wider story of the development of educational studies in the UK and the English-speaking world more generally, it does shed light on the events and the actors that have been influential in shaping the particular configuration of the field. And while history cannot be turned back, I find it tempting to ponder for just a brief moment the 'What if?'-question.

What if the Rockefeller Foundation had not given money to Harvard for strengthening the role of Liberal Arts subjects in their School of Education? What if Scheffler had not gone on a sabbatical to the UK? What if educationists in the USA wouldn't have had such a bad name? And what if Peters, instead of accepting Scheffler's invitation to come to Harvard, had decided to go to Germany? While it may not have changed the course of events, it would at least have exposed him to another possible configuration of the field, namely that of education as an academic discipline in its own right rather than an applied field of study dependent upon 'other' academic disciplines (on these two different configurations see also Biesta, 2011).

That the idea of education as an academic discipline in its own right didn't come to fruition in the English-speaking world is simply a historical fact. What is more interesting, however, is that this option was also explicitly rejected. This can be glanced from a chapter Paul Hirst contributed to a book published in 1966 under the editorship of J.W. Tibble called *The Study of Education* (Tibble, 1966b). I want to give a brief indication of Hirst's argument in order to show the argumentation he developed in favour of the particular configuration of educational studies in Britain which, at the very same time, was an argument against the idea of education as an academic discipline in its own right.

2.4. Educational Theory and the Disciplines

Hirst's chapter in *The Study of Education* starts from the observation that questions as 'What is educational theory, as a theoretical pursuit, trying to achieve? How does this theory relate to educational practice? What kind of theoretical structure has it got and how in fact do the various elements that are obviously a part of it fit in it?' have received 'far too little sustained attention' (Hirst, 1966, p. 30). As a result 'educational studies have tended to become either a series of unrelated or even competing theoretical pursuits, or a confused discussion of educational problems where philosophical, psychological, sociological or historical and other issues jostle against one another, none being adequately dealt with' (Hirst, 1966, p. 30). This is why Hirst aims to move towards 'a more adequate framework within which research and teaching in this area can develop' (Hirst, 1966, p. 30).

Hirst puts forward a very specific and precise notion of educational theory. Starting from O'Connor's (1957) distinction between theory as 'a set or system of rules or a collection of precepts which guide or control actions of various kinds' and theory as 'a single hypothesis or a logically interconnected set of hypotheses that have been confirmed by observation' (Hirst, 1966, p. 38) he, unlike O'Connor, opts for the former as the most appropriate notion of theory for education. 'Educational theory is in the first place to be understood as the essential background to rational educational practice not as a limited would-be

scientific pursuit' (Hirst, 1966, p. 40). Whereas '(i)n the case of the empirical sciences, a theory is a body of statements that have been subjected to empirical tests and which express our understanding of certain aspects of the physical world,' in the case of 'a practical activity like education' theory 'is not the end product of the pursuit, but rather it is constructed to determine and guide the activity' (Hirst, 1966, p. 40).

Hirst thus makes a distinction between educational theory in a narrow and a wider sense. The first concerns 'the body of scientific knowledge on which rational educational judgments rest,' while the second refers to 'the whole enterprise of building a body of rational principles for educational practice' (Hirst, 1966, p. 41). And he emphasises that the difference between 'scientific theory' and 'educational theory' is not a difference of degree or scale but expresses a *logical* difference between judgements about 'what is the case' and 'what ought to be the case' (Hirst, 1966, p. 41) – or, to be more precise, about 'what ought to be done in educational activities' (Hirst, 1966, p. 53).

While Hirst is articulating a conception of educational theory that is rather close to educational practice, the fact that he is developing his argument in the context of the presence of a number of disciplines that claim to have to say something about education leads him to the conclusion that the reasons that inform the 'rational principles for educational practice' must be judged *solely* according to the standards of the particular disciplines they stem from. 'The psychological reasons must be shown to stand to the strict canons of that science. Equally the historical, philosophical or other truths that are appealed to must be judged according to the criteria of the relevant discipline in each case.' (Hirst, 1966, p. 51) And it is this line of reasoning that leads Hirst to the conclusion that educational theory is not and cannot be 'an autonomous discipline' because it does not generate 'some unique form of understanding about education' in addition to what is generated through the fundamental disciplines (Hirst, 1966, p. 51).

A couple of years later we find this argument expressed strongly and succinctly and in a kind of 'matter of fact' way by Tibble in a book called *An introduction to the study of education* (Tibble, 1971a).

> It is clear that 'education' is a field subject, not a basic discipline; there is no distinctively 'educational' way of thinking; in studying education one is using psychological or historical or sociological or philosophical ways of thinking to throw light on some problem in the field of human learning. (Tibble, 1971b, p. 16)

2.5. *Still a Colonised Province?*

This brief history of the development of educational studies not just shows how the field of educational studies established itself as an applied 'field' of study,

but also shows how this particular configuration was justified, namely as a 'field subject' and not as a 'basic discipline'. This particular configuration, as mentioned, differs fundamentally from the way in which the study of education established itself in Germany where, around the turn of the 19th century, it did achieve the status of a 'basic discipline' under the name of 'geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik'. By referring to the discipline of 'Pädagogik' as a 'Geisteswissensschaft,' it firmly located itself on the side of the humanities, not the social sciences (see Biesta, 2015b).

Using Herbart's words, we could not just say that educational studies as a 'field subject' *is* a colonised province; we could also say that educational studies *happily* is such a province, that is, a field subject which, for its intellectual input, relies on insights from other – some might say 'real' – academic disciplines (see also Furlong, 2013; Lawn and Furlong, 2009; McCulloch and Cowan, 2017). Hence the existence of the psychology of education, the sociology of education, the philosophy of education and the history of education. Whereas from time to time scholars have questioned this set up – for example Brian Simon with his question 'Why no pedagogy in England? (Simon, 1981) or Robin Alexander with his (rhetorical) question 'Still no pedagogy?' (Alexander, 2004) – the idea of educational studies as the multidisciplinary study of education is more or less the common sense of the field.

That this common sense actually circumscribes what is considered meaningful, was brought home to me in the response of a reviewer to a manuscript I had submitted to a journal in the field of education. In the manuscript I noticed that psychology of education asks psychological questions about education, that sociology of education asks sociological questions about education, philosophy of education philosophical questions and history of education historical questions. While, as such, all this is sound and legitimate scholarship, I then asked, informed by my own academic socialisation in the Continental 'configuration' of the field who, in this set up, was actually asking the *educational* questions. The telling response I got back from one of the reviewers read: 'To suggest that one can ask educational questions about education, is as non-sensical as the suggestion that one can ask cookery questions about cooking.' Although frustrating at the time, I came to realise that the feedback was actually extremely helpful for realising that within the idea of educational studies as a 'field subject,' the idea that one can ask educational questions about education (in addition or next to psychological, sociological, philosophical and historical ones) is simply beyond the boundaries of what makes sense.

3. THE NEED FOR EDUCATIONAL THEORY

But does the educational question matter? I wish to argue that it does, and that this question is both crucial for the integrity of educational practice and for the integrity of educational studies, now and in the future. The main reason for this

has to do with a remarkable blind spot in the set up of educational studies as a 'field subject.' Although different disciplines can ask interesting and important questions about education, the question that outside of this set up is how disciplines that wish to study 'education' are able to identify their object of study. After all, even if one is able to identify a school, college or university, one cannot simply walk into such a building and 'see' education, as this needs a criterion for identifying what may *count* as education. Should the researcher look at the teacher to 'see' education – on the assumption that the teacher is identifiable and has not become a fellow learner? Or should the researcher look at the janitor? Or the architecture of the building? Or at the student? Or perhaps at saliva samples, brain function and heart rates?

If the field of educational studies has no explicit account of what its object is or how its object is 'made' (for the latter phrase see Fabian, 1982), it not just runs the risk of relying on every day, unreflective or possibly even populist ideas about education. It also runs the risk of relying on what, on further inspection, may turn out to be misunderstandings and misrepresentations of education (see below), which, of course, only can be named as such if there is a proper conception of education in the first place. And this work, that is, the conceptualisation of education, relies, in turn, on the existence of proper forms of theory and theorising – that is *educational* forms, rather than 'applied' forms.

At this point it would have been nice if I would have been able to turn to a different country or setting and provide an example of a context in which education had developed into a stable 'autonomous discipline,' to use Hirst's phrase. And it would even have been nicer if, in discussing this example, I could have shown how one of the main weaknesses of educational studies in the English speaking world, that is, its struggle to generate educational questions about education and, more fundamentally, to identify its object of study, had been successfully resolved. Because in that case I could at least have outlined a possible future for educational studies in the English speaking world. While it is tempting to refer to Germany in the first decades of the 20th century, a period in which, as mentioned, 'Pädagogik' did manage to establish a relatively stable disciplinary identity, it is more honest, and also more instructive, to look at more recent developments in Germany and beyond, in order to understand challenges and possibilities for the future of educational studies. So what happened with 'geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik' and what does this make visible about the state and status of educational theory and theorising?[1]

3.1. *The Precarious State of Educational Theory*

In the late 1950s and 1960s 'geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik' came under attack from two different sides (see also Bellmann, 2022). On the one hand there were those who, under the influence of the rise of 'kritische Theorie' (the

Frankfurt School), sought to turn educational scholarship into a critical social science, thus replacing the educational vocabulary of 'geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik' with its strong emphasis on the personal 'pedagogical' relation, with insights and ideas from psychology, sociology, social theory and philosophy (see, e.g., influential contributions from Klaus Mollenhauer such as Mollenhauer, 1968, 1972). On the other hand there were those who, under the influence of the rise of Karl Popper's critical rationalism and related forms of neo-positivist theory of science, sought to transform educational scholarship into an explanatory empirical science. In Germany this was argued, for example, by Wolfgang Brezinka in his 1972 publication 'Von der Pädagogik zur Erziehungswissenschaft' (Brezinka, 1972), in which he argued that 'Pädagogik,' with its location in the humanities, should be turned into a science of education.

In Germany and other countries in which education had established itself as an autonomous discipline – the Netherlands is another example (see Van Hilvoorde, 2002) – this led to the construction of a strong opposition between empirical and theoretical forms of scholarship, where the latter were often seen by proponents of the former as nothing but speculation. On the assumption that 'real' scientific research ought to be explanatory research, or at least research that focuses on the falsification of testable hypotheses, this also led to a discrediting of interpretative forms of research, which were often cast aside as non-scientific forms of journalism. That this discussion – one could also call it a controversy – is ongoing, can be seen, for example, in the fact that in Germany in 2012 researchers established the society for empirical educational research ('Gesellschaft für empirische Bildungsforschung') in order to distinguish themselves explicitly from the long-established 'Deutsche Gesellschaft für Erziehungswissenschaft' (the German society for educational research and scholarship – it would be too narrow to translate the German word 'Wissenschaft' just with 'research' or with 'science').

In the eyes of those who believe that real research is empirical research, and that the proper 'home' for educational research and scholarship is in the explanatory empirical social sciences rather than the humanities, these developments can only appear as progress, that is, as the coming-of-age of educational research. For those at the opposite end of the spectrum, this history is more one of decline. It is important to see, however, that the issue is not – or not just – about whether educational scholarship belongs to the social sciences or to the humanities. After all, even those who argue that educational scholarship should be located within the humanities, can still do so by arguing that education is just a practical field and not a discipline in its own right with its own forms of theory and theorising. The issue, therefore, is not whether education is 'at home' in the social sciences or the humanities, but whether education is just a field of

practice that can be studied from many angles, or whether it has its own practical and intellectual integrity.

In addition to feelings about progress and decline, there is also a degree of regret. Whereas Klaus Mollenhauer can be seen as an important figure in trying to turn educational scholarship into a critical social science (rather than a quantitative-empirical social science), his 1983 book Vergessene Zusamenhänge – published in English translation in 2013 as Forgotten Connections (see Mollenhauer, 1983, 2013) – can be read as an exploration of what was lost in turning education into a critical social science, and as an attempt at regaining and reconnecting with more properly educational forms of theory and theorising.

Of perhaps even greater significance are Wolfgang Brezinka's reflections on the empirical 'turn' in education in his 2015 paper "Die, Verwissenschaftlichung' der Pädagogik und ihre Folgen: Rückblick und Ausblick" (in English: 'The consequences of turning "Pädagogik" into a science: Looking back and looking forward') (Brezinka, 2015). In it Brezinka strongly criticises how the turn towards 'science' has resulted in narrow rationalism and one-sided scientism (see Brezinka, 2015, p. 293). Remarkably, he concludes with an argument for a de-scientisation (in German: 'Ent-wissenschaftlichung') of the field of education, at the very least so as to create a more balanced situation, but also in order to save educational practice and educational scholarship from distorting forms of research and theory – almost as an attempt 'to free education from the domination by scientists,' to paraphrase Conant.

3.2. *Misunderstanding Education*

These developments do not just show the precarious state and status of education as an autonomous discipline with its own forms of theory and theorising, but are part of a wider theory aversion in education. This aversion is, for example, visible in the idea that education is a practical matter and *therefore* doesn't need theory (which, of course, relies on a rather simplistic notion of practice). It is also visible in the suggestion that the only relevant questions for the practice of education are about 'what works,' which are practical and empirical questions, not theoretical ones. And there is a more general belief that education is actually quite simple and straightforward and that engagement with theory is just a case of 'doing difficult' for the sake of doing difficult. The situation is not helped, of course, by the fact that with regard to education everyone claims to be an expert, at the very least because almost everyone has experienced education. Despite much talk about education, and despite many strong opinions about education there is, however, a remarkable misunderstanding of education which is also a misrepresentation and perhaps even a 'forgetfulness' about education.[2] Let me briefly discuss three examples of this.

3.2.1. Wishful Thinking

The first misunderstanding has to do with the large degree of *wishful thinking* in education. Wishful thinking occurs each time someone claims that education – and it is remarkable that it is often education in the abstract, not educators in the concrete – *should* do something. Education *should* give students knowledge and skills, education *should* turn students into good citizens, education *should* prepare students well for the labour market, education *should* bring about emancipation, education *should* make students into critical thinkers, education *should* produce a literate workforce, education *should* provide students with competences for intercultural communication, education *should* ensure equality of opportunity, and so on. The list is more or less endless. Many discussions in education, be it from policy be it from research, end up with such 'shopping lists.' Sometimes policy makers and politicians think that they only need to provide schools, colleges and universities with absolute clarity about what is expected and that, once clarity has been provided, everyone should simply 'get on with it.'

While it might be helpful to have a clear sense of what education should do, just to say that something *should* happen does not make it happen. What is overlooked in all the 'shoulds' is the question *how* educators are supposed to realise all the items that are on the wish lists. And what is also overlooked, is the question *whether* education is actually able to deliver on all the 'shoulds' that are being put in its direction. In what way and to what extent, so we should ask, are all the 'shoulds' of education properly *educational* issues. This is not just the technical matter of whether education *can* deliver on all the 'shoulds'. After all, if that were the only question, then the only thing that would be needed is ongoing investment in improving and increasing the effectiveness of education. But there is also the more fundamental question whether education can be seen as the proper and responsible 'agent' to deliver on all these 'shoulds.' Why, for example, should we assume that the question of social inequality is a matter for education to resolve, rather than it being a task for, say economic policy and social security and welfare (see Biesta, 2020a)? Or why would we assume that it is an educational task to take care of the democratic quality of a society, rather than it being a key responsibility of the government and the public sphere (see Biesta, 2022a)?

In the literature this problem is sometimes referred to as the *educationalisation* of societal problems (see Smeyers and Depaepe, 2008). Educationalisation is not just about the situation in which education is tasked with addressing society's problems. It also refers to the transformation of such problems *into* educational problems. The latter is particularly pernicious, because once a problem is defined as an educational problem, there will be significant pressure on education to 'deliver,' which also creates the situation in which education can conveniently be blamed if a particular societal problem is not resolved.

All this does not just play out in relation to the 'shoulds' that surround education. The other little word that encompasses the very same gesture is the word 'for,' such as in education *for* democracy, education *for* sustainability, education *for* social justice, education *for* a better world, education *for* economic competitiveness, and so on. In all these agendas the emphasis is always on the latter part – democracy, sustainability, social justice, a better world, economic competitiveness – and never on the former part, that is, education *itself*. But again, whether education can deliver on all such agendas and whether any of these agendas are actually properly educational matters, disappears quickly from sight.

3.2.2. Causality and Effectiveness

A second area in which we can find an ongoing and persistent misunderstanding of education is in what some refer to as the case for 'evidence' in education and others discuss in terms of the 'effectiveness' of education. As I have argued elsewhere in more detail (see particularly Biesta, 2007, 2010a, in press), the key issue with regard to evidence and effectiveness is *not* whether education should be evidence-*based* or evidence-*informed*, but rather has to do with the conception of education that comes with the case for evidence and effectiveness. And the main problem here, is that in much talk about evidence and effectiveness education itself is constructed as a quasi-causal[3] process consisting of 'teaching interventions' which in some way and under specific or 'ideal' conditions should generate or produce 'learning outcomes.'

It is in this particular depiction of the dynamics of education that the real problem lies, and not in the question whether education should be based upon or informed by it. The reason why this is so, lies in the fact that education is not a process of physical 'push and pull,' but of communication and interpretation. This is not to suggest that anything goes in education, but it does highlight that the interaction between teachers and students is one where teachers talk – they present, they represent, they explain, they instruct – and students try to make sense of what they are being presented with, try to do what teachers ask or tell them to do, and so on. Of course, teachers try to do their best in giving their students a sense of what they are after, try to create helpful tasks for them, encourage them to focus on particular things, provide them with opportunities for practicing, and provide them with feedback on what they have achieved. But at no moment in all this, does the teaching become an intervention *upon* students, and neither can what students do and achieve be seen as an 'outcome' produced by such an intervention.

One way to state what the problem here is, is in terms of the well-known point that correlation does not imply causation. Of course it is possible to find correlations between what teachers do and how they do it and what students do and what this results in. One could even say that good teachers are always working in this 'field,' keeping a keen eye on what they present their students

with and how this helps or hinders. But even when teachers talk enthusiastically with their colleagues about something they have done and colleagues ask, 'Did it work?,' no one would imply with that question that they were talking about causal mechanisms in the classroom. Education doesn't 'work' in the way in which a clockwork works. Teachers know this; students know this. Researchers, in their eagerness to generate 'useful' knowledge, run the risk of forgetting this, and when teachers, or policy makers, 'fall' for the shiny promises of some research, they run the risk of forgetting what they knew all along about the dynamics and complexities of educational practice. They begin to misunderstand what they used to understand.[4]

3.2.3. *Bio-Neuro-Socio-Cultural Thinking*

The third misunderstanding of education has to do with the ongoing incursion of theories and perspectives that tend to 'forget' the educational question or are unable to get at it. This is for example a problem with notions of learning and growth, particularly if they appear as the claim that the point of education is to make students learn, the point of teaching is to facilitate students' learning, or that education should promote growth, sometimes in order to make further growth possible. As I have discussed extensively elsewhere (beginning with Biesta, 2004), the point of education can never be just to promote learning and growth, because learning and growth are directionless terms and directionless phenomena – students can learn anything and can grow in any direction. Or more bluntly: good criminals also need to learn and grow. In education there is therefore always the need to specify what the learning is supposed to be about and, more importantly what it is supposed to be for. Similarly, education always raises the question which growth is considered to be desirable – which is not an easy question to answer, but an essential one from the perspective of education.

This is also a problem when education is approached from a psychological angle. While psychology might be able to shed light on how individuals develop and grow, including development and growth of knowledge and understanding, this can still go in many directions, so that, without a criterion and a justification for the criterion, the educational question quickly disappears from sight. References to the brain often suffer from a similar problem, particularly when it is highlighted that the brain is highly adaptive and therefore allows individuals to adapt effectively to changing environing conditions. This may well be true, but the point of our human existence is that we are not just adapting to the situations around us, but also can encounter situations where we should offer resistance, where we should refuse to adapt to what is going on around is. While 'intelligent organisms' and nowadays also intelligent artificial systems may be good at adaptation, they lack the ability to offer resistance, to say no in those

situations where adaptation would be problematic, first of all for moral or political reasons.

It is here that another important dimension of education comes into view, as education can never be just about the cultivation of individuals, but always should have a concern for and orientation towards their existence as person or, with the word I prefer in my own work, their existence as subject (see, for example, Biesta, 2020b). Here it can never be just about learning, development or growth, and not even about the acquisition of skills or understanding, but always about the additional question what the student *will do* with what they have learned and how they have become, particularly when it matters. The question how to lead one's life, what to do with what one has learned, with how one has developed as a result of the interplay of individual and social and cultural factors, is a question that 'cuts through' the bio-neuro-socio-cultural 'order.' This implies that if we just try to capture education in terms of the ways in which individual living organisms become cultivated through their interaction with socio-cultural environments, there is a real risk that this existential dimension is 'missed' and thus education itself remains misunderstood.

4. Understanding Education

The foregoing observations already begin to suggest what a more adequate understanding of education might look like. In the final step of this paper I wish to present two approaches which, in my view, provide helpful starting points for forms of theory and theorising that are properly educational and thus can contribute to safeguarding the integrity of education against misunderstandings and misrepresentations. I will characterise the first as a conceptual approach, as it seeks to articulate what the key educational question and interest are. I will characterise the second as a formal approach, as it takes its cue from the unique and distinctive form of teaching.

4.1. *The Integrity of Education: A Conceptual Approach*

In his book *Allgemeine Pädagogik* (Benner, 2015) the German educational scholar Dietrich Benner asks whether education matters, that is, whether the educational work of teachers and parents makes a difference in the lives of children and young people. He raises this question in terms of the so-called 'nature-nurture' debate. We cannot deny, so Benner argues, that as human beings we are natural beings, so 'nature' is definitely a component of how we become who we are. We also cannot deny that we are influenced by the environments in which we live, so 'nurture' is also a component of how we become who we are. The question this then raises is in what way education

plays a role in this which Benner asks as the question what education's contribution is in relation to (influences from) nature and nurture.

It is an interesting thought-experiment to put percentages on all three. Looking at the history of this discussion, there are times when there has been a strong emphasis on the 'nurture' component, that is on the role of the social, cultural and political contexts in which children and young people grow up. Nowadays we find quite vocal arguments for the importance of 'nature,' for example through arguments that a significant degree of how we become is actually genetically pre-programmed. Also there are educational optimists, who tend to think that education makes a significant difference, and educational pessimists who tend to think that the contribution education makes is relatively small or even marginal. Benner's own answer to his question is, however, quite remarkable, because he argues that although we can disagree about the exact percentages, nature and nurture *together* always amount to 100% (see Benner, 2015, p. 73).

At first sight it may indeed seem remarkable that an eminent professor of education seems to see no role for and no contribution from education at all. After all, if nature and nurture together always account for 100%, there seems to be nothing left for education. The point Benner makes, however, is that as educators we are not interested in the question how individuals become who they are as a result of the combination of natural and environmental factors – an interplay that will always work out slightly differently for each individual. As educators, so Benner argues, we are interested in a *different* question which, in everyday language, we can formulate as the question what an individual will *do* with how and who they have become.

As educators we are interested, in other words, in how an 'I' can be called forward from a particular 'mix' of nature and nurture. This suggests, according to Benner (and I follow him in his line of thinking; see Biesta, 2021) that the educational question is an *existential* question. The educational question is not about how individuals develop as a result of their interaction with particular socio-cultural environments. The educational question is also not about what individuals may or may not learn as a result of such interactions. The educational question and hence the 'proper' educational interest is about how human beings, as individuals, *exist*, that is, how they try to lead their own life, make choices, suffer consequences, say 'yes' to some opportunities and 'no' to others, get out of bed in the morning or have a lie in, engage with aging and illness, with love and hate, with joy and guilt, and so on.

The educational question is therefore not about *who we are* and how we become who we are. This is the question of *identity* and while this question is important, identity can never be the last word in education or in our lives. If the educational question is about how we exist, how we try to lead our lives and live our lives, then we could say that the educational question is about *how we are*, which includes the question what we will do with our identity, so to speak. The educational question is

therefore about how we try to exist as *subject* of our own life and not as object of forces 'external' to us.

And this in turn means that the educational 'work' is that of trying to focus the attention of the new generation of their possibility to exist as subject of their own life, particularly in those situations where other forces try to undermine this possibility and draw their attention in different directions.[5] Benner has a very helpful and appropriate phrase for describing what the work of educators entails. In German he calls it 'Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit' (see Benner, 2015). While this can be translated as a 'summoning to self-action,' we have to bear in mind that this is neither the call to be *your*self (which is the matter of identity) nor the call to be(come) *active*. It rather is the call to be *a* self, to exist as self, which is also the call not to forget yourself.

4.2. *The Integrity of Education: A Formal Approach*

While Benner in a sense remains close to Herbart's search for education's proper concepts, that is, the ideas and notions that uniquely belong to education and thus try to articulate what education is and is about, another German scholar, Klaus Prange, has proposed a rather different approach for delineating and safeguarding the integrity of education through his insistence on the importance of taking the *form* of education and, more specifically the form of teaching, seriously (see Prange, 2012a, 2012b; see also Biesta, 2022b).

Prange has argued that the fundamental and distinctive form in which education is enacted is through *pointing* (in German: Zeigen). He has gone as far as to argue that without pointing there is no education (see Prange, 2012a, p. 25[6]). When teachers point to something – which can be an object, a phenomenon, but also a text or textbook – they try to direct the attention of their students onto what they are pointing at. Prange maintains that teaching is an attempt at focusing the student's attention onto something and suggests, more strongly, that teaching *demands* the student's attention. But Prange emphasises again and again that teaching can never *enforce* the student's attention – in this regard teaching is fundamentally a weak practice (see Biesta, 2010a) – nor that teaching can *control* the student's attention.

There are two further aspects that are important with regard to Prange's analysis of the form of teaching. One is that pointing is a 'double act,' in that it always points (out) some*thing* to some*one*. The gesture of pointing is not just a 'Look there,' but always is a '*You*, look there.' It therefore always entails an appeal to *someone* to pay attention to something. This also reveals that teaching has a triadic rather than a dyadic or dialogical structure, since teaching always involves a teacher, a student and something that the teacher is trying to focus the student's attention on (Prange calls this the theme; in my theory of world-centred education I refer to this as the world – see Biesta, 2021).

The work of teaching, so we might say, is to bring teacher, student and theme into 'conversation' or, with a term from Herbart, into articulation. Prange highlights that all this means that teaching is first and foremost a form of manual labour (in German: 'Handwerk,' that is, the work of the hand) as pointing needs a finger (see Prange, 2012b). This is, of course, not the moralising finger of 'I told you so!,' but the finger that gently points away from the student, signalling a 'Hey you, have a look there as I think that there may be something there that may be worth for you to pay attention to.'

One intriguing question that follows from Prange's explorations is what students should do, once their attention has been (re)directed onto something. At a very fundamental level, the answer to this question has to be that this is entirely up to them. We, as educators, may have hopes and expectations, but we cannot enforce them upon our students, precisely because we are calling them to *their* attention, not to *our* attention, so to speak. For Prange this means that the gesture of pointing entails a concern for the freedom of the student. This is, of course, not the neo-liberal 'freedom of shopping' (Biesta, 2019b), that is the freedom just to do what you fancy to do. Rather it is the freedom to attend to the world and do what only I can do in encountering the world. In this regard, so we might say, the point of the teacher is actually an 'Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit,' that is, a summoning to be a self and engaging in one's own responsible response to what comes into one's field of attention.

5. CONCLUDING COMMENTS: THE FUTURE OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

In this paper I have explored the question of what I have referred to as the integrity of education, which concerns both the integrity of educational practice and the integrity of the study of education. I have situated my concerns in the context of the ongoing instrumentalisation of education. Whereas many critics of treating education as an instrument push back against narrow agendas for education, I have argued that broader and more sympathetic agendas are also agendas and therefore also run the risk of treating education as an instrument.

For education to be able to speak back to such agenda setting, particularly when such agendas run the risk of undermining education, it needs to be able to articulate its own 'voice,' so to speak, and the main part of this paper has been an exploration of whether and how education might find and articulate its own 'voice.' Through a reconstruction of the history of educational studies in the English-speaking world I have shown that in its configuration as an 'applied field' it lacks the resources to speak with an educational voice. This makes the field of educational studies vulnerable, and I have argued that this is particularly so in relation to the rise of empirical modes of research, particularly those in search of evidence about 'what works,' but also in relation to ongoing misunderstandings of what education is and what it is about and for.

In a final step I have suggested that there are at least two ways to develop and, in a sense, regain an educational identity for the field of educational studies. This is either, following Herbart, by identifying proper educational *concepts and ideas* or, against Herbart, by identifying the unique and distinctive *form* of education. Given the ongoing instrumentalisation of education, the ongoing rise of the simplistic search for evidence about 'what works,' and ongoing misunderstandings of education in research, policy and practice, it will be important for the future of educational studies to enhance and deepen its educational identity so as to become a distinctive voice in the study of education rather than remaining an applied field. In this paper I have tried to indicate why such a future is needed and what steps might be taken to make educational studies more educational in its orientation and outlook.

6. Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

7. Notes

[1]   The question how 'educational' educational research and scholarship can be, should be and are 'allowed' to be, has not been confined to Continental Europe. Ellen Condliffe Lagemann has very helpfully documented the 'troubling history of educational research in North America (see Condliffe Lagemann, 2000), while David Labaree has highlighted the ongoing 'trouble with Ed Schools' (see Labaree, 2004).

[2]   Here I allude to Heidegger's idea of 'Seinsvergessenheit,' which, for education, would be a case of 'Erziehungsvergessenheit'.

[3]   I sue the term 'quasi-causal,' as many proponents of evidence and effectiveness do acknowledge that there is, at least with the etc.

[4]   In an interesting chapter, Krautz (2019) has recently argued that contemporary educational thinking increasingly makes use of a cybernetic logic, that is, the logic of the thermostat, which begins with setting a desired end-value – such as a learning outcome or one of the other 'shoulds' mentioned above – and think that in order to make education work we need to keep pushing, pulling and adjusting until the desired end-value is reached. This observation, which I think is very revealing, shows how education itself increasingly becomes a 'black box' that needs to be 'managed' from the outside, rather than that we still understand the complexity of its internal dynamics, brought about by human action and interaction.

[5]   In my book *World-Centred Education* (Biesta, 2021) I argue how capitalist economies, because they have an ongoing interest in their own growth, are constantly trying to tell us that we should desire *more* so that we will buy more, and thus are constantly trying to seduce us to simply pursue our desires rather than raising the question whether what emerges in us as a desire is what we should be desiring. Such an 'impulse society' (Roberts, 2014) thus constantly threatens the possibility for human beings to exist as subject of their own life.

[6]   In German: 'Wenn es das Zeigen nicht gibt, dann auch keine Erziehung'

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