This article provides a critical examination of the 'new language of learning' which has become dominant in educational discourse over the past decades. It is argued that the new language of learning allows for an understanding of education as an economic exchange between a provider and consumer. Such an understanding, exemplified in the idea of 'meeting the needs of the learner', not only makes it difficult to represent the contributions educators and teachers make to the educational process; it also makes it very difficult to have an informed, democratic discussion about the content and purpose of education. It is argued, therefore, that we need to reclaim a language of and for education, a language which is able to understand what actually constitutes educational relationships.
This article provides an outline of a possible language of and for education; one which focuses on trust, violence and responsibility as important constituents of relationships that are truly educational.

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Against learning

Reclaiming a language for education in an age of learning

GERT BIESTA

The language of education

Why does language matter to education? If we would only think of language as a description of reality, there wouldn't be too much to say in answer to this question. In that case education simply 'is' and language simply describes what 'is'. Yet we all know that description is only one of the functions of language – and itself a highly problematic one. Language is not simply a mirror of reality. At least since Dewey and Wittgenstein we know that language is a practice, that it is something we do. And at least since Foucault we know that linguistic or discursive practices delineate – and perhaps we can even say: constitute – what can be seen, what can be said, what can be known, what can be thought and, ultimately, what can be done. Just as language makes some ways of saying and doing possible, it makes other ways of saying and doing difficult or even impossible. This is one important reason why language matters to education, because the language or languages we have available to speak about education determine to a large extent what can be said and done, and thus what cannot be said and done.

In this article I wish to focus on the way in which the language available to educators has changed over the past two decades. I will argue that the language of education has largely been replaced by a language of *learning*. Although this «new

language of learning» has made it possible to express ideas and insights that were rather difficult to articulate through the language of education, other aspects of our understanding of what education is or should be about have become increasingly more difficult to articulate. Something has been lost in the shift from the language of education to the language of learning. It for this reason that I wish to argue in this article that there is a need to reclaim a language *of* education *for* education. To do so, however, cannot simply mean a return to the language or languages that we have used in the past. In a sense the task before us is to re-invent a language for education, a language that is responsive to the theoretical and practical challenges we are faced with today (Biesta, 2002).

Many educators, past and present, have taken inspiration from an emancipatory language of education. There is a long tradition which focuses on education as a process of individual emancipation conceived as a trajectory from childhood to adulthood, from dependence to independence. Critical pedagogy has helped us to see that there is no individual emancipation without societal emancipation. Notwithstanding the difference in emphasis, both traditions are intimately connected with the Enlightenment idea of emancipation through rational understanding. This is expressed in the idea that the ultimate aim of education is rational autonomy. We now live in an era in which we are beginning to see that there is not one rationality but that there are many, an era which we could call post-modern or post-colonial.

We now also live in an era in which we are beginning to see that cognition, knowledge, is only one way to relate to the natural and social world, and not necessarily the most fruitful, important or liberating one. The political and ecological crises that we are witnessing today are an indication that the

worldview which underlies the emancipatory language of education may have reached its exhaustion. The most important question for us today is no longer how we can rationally master the natural and social world. The most important question is how we can respond responsibly to, and how we can live peacefully with what and with whom is other (e.g., Biesta, 2000; Säfström & Biesta, 2001).

In what follows I wish to make a modest contribution to the development of an educational language that is responsive to these challenges. I will suggest building blocks for a language which puts an emphasis on relationships, on trust and on responsibility, while acknowledging the difficult (see below) character of educational relationships. My purpose is to create an awareness of the importance of the language we use as educators, not only in a reflective and reactive way, but in a pro-active and constructive way as well.

The new language of learning

One of the most remarkable changes that has taken place over the past two decades in the way in which we speak about and in education, is the rise of the concept of 'learning' and the subsequent decline of the concept of 'education.' Teaching has, for example, become redefined as supporting or facilitating learning, just as education is now often described as the provision of learning opportunities or learning experiences. Adult education has become adult learning. And governments of many countries nowadays stress the need for lifelong learning and the development of a learning society, instead of talking about the need for permanent or recurrent education (e.g., Ranson, 1994; Edwards, 1997). Learning has also become a favourite concept in policy documents. The British government has, for example, recently pro-

duced documents with such ambitious titles as *The Learning Age: A Renaissance for a New Britain* (DfEE, 1998) and *Learning to Succeed* (DfEE, 1999). The UK now even has an internet based provision for everyone who wants to learn, called *Learn Direct* – or to be more precise, since this is a registered trademark: *learndirect*®. The start page of its website says it as follows:

Welcome to *learndirect*
learndirect is a brand new form of learning – that's for everyone!
learndirect learning is designed with you in mind. Our courses are computer-based but don't let that bother you! The easiest way to get started is to go to one of the many *learndirect* centres around the country. Our friendly staff will be on hand to help you out. You don't need any experience – we'll take you through your learning step by step. (http://www.learndirect.co.uk/personal; accessed at 03.03.10)

The following extract from a document on lifelong learning published by the European Commission provides a clear example of what I propose to call the «new language of learning»:

Placing learners and learning at the centre of education and training methods and processes is by no means a new idea, but in practice, the established framing of pedagogic practices in most formal contexts has privileged teaching rather than learning. /.../ In a high-technology knowledge society, this kind of teaching-learning loses efficacy: learners must become proactive and more autonomous, prepared to renew their knowledge continuously and to respond constructively to changing constellations of problems and contexts. The teacher's role becomes one of accompaniment, facilitation, mentoring, support and guidance in the service of learners' own efforts to access, use and ultimately create knowledge. (Commission of the European

Communities, 1998, p. 9; quoted in Field, 2000, p.136)

Although the concept of 'learning' has become almost omnipresent in contemporary educational discourse, it is important to see that the new language of learning is not the outcome of a particular process or the expression of a single underlying agenda. The new language of learning is the result of a combination of different, partly even contradictory trends and developments. The new language of learning is, in other words, an effect of a range of events, rather than the intended outcome of a particular programme or agenda. There are at least four trends which, in one way or another, have contributed to the rise of the new language of learning.

New theories of learning
One influential development can be found in the field of the psychology of learning and concerns the emergence of constructivist and socio-cultural theories of learning (e.g., Fosnot, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991). The idea that learning is not a passive intake of information, but that knowledge and understanding are actively constructed by the learner, often in co-operation with fellow-learners, has shifted the attention away from the activities of the teacher to the activities of the student. This has not only made learning much more central in the understanding of the process of education. Notions such as 'scaffolding' have provided a perspective and a language in which teaching can easily be redefined as facilitating learning.

Postmodernism
The impact of postmodernism on education and educational theory has also contributed to the rise of the language of learning. Over the past twenty years many authors have argued that the project of education is a tho-

roughly modern project, intimately connected with the heritage of the Enlightenment (e.g., Usher & Edwards, 1994). As a result, the postmodern doubt about the possibility and viability of the project of modernity has raised fundamental questions about the possibility and viability of education, especially with respect to the idea that educators can liberate and emancipate their students. If, as has for example been argued by Giesecke (1985), postmodernism means that we have reached the end of education, what else can there be left but learning?

The 'silent explosion'
The rise of 'learning' is not only to be accounted for on the level of theoretical and conceptual shifts. As Field (2000, p. 35 ff.) has shown, more and more people are nowadays spending more and more of their time – and money – on all kind of different forms of learning, both inside and outside the formal settings of the established educational institutions. There is not only conclusive evidence that the volume and level of participation in formal adult leaning are increasing. There is also a rapidly growing market for non-formal forms of learning, such as fitness centres, sport clubs, self-help therapy manuals, internet learning, self-instructional video's, DVD's and CD's, etcetera. One of the most significant characteristics of what Field calls the «silent explosion of learning», is that the new learning is far more individualistic. Field also argues that the content and purpose of adult learning have changed, in that many adult learners are primarily struggling with themselves, for example with their body, their identity, and their relationships. The individualistic and individualised nature of the activities in which the new adult learners are engaged, is one of the most important reasons why the word learning seems such an appropriate concept to use.

The erosion of the welfare state
The rise of 'learning' can also be related to larger socio-economic and political developments, particularly the erosion of the welfare state and the rise of neo-liberalism, something that has happened in many Western countries for a combination of ideological (Thatcherism, Reaganism) and economic reasons (the 1973 oil crisis and the slowdown of the world economy in the last decades of the 20th century). Central to welfarism is the idea of redistribution, so that provisions such as health care, social security and education can be made available to all citizens, and not only to those who can afford them. Although much of this is still in place in many countries (albeit with increasing levels of public-private partnerships or even full-blown privatisation), the relationship between governments and citizens has in many cases changed into a relationship between the state as provider of public services and taxpayers as consumers of these services.

«Value for money» has become the main principle in many of the transactions between the state and its taxpayers. This way of thinking lies at the basis of the emergence of a culture of accountability in education and other public services, which has brought about ever-tighter systems of inspection and control, and ever-more prescriptive educational protocols. It also is the logic behind voucher systems and the idea that parents, as the «consumers» of the education of their children, should ultimately decide what should happen in schools (for a critical analysis see, e.g., Whitty, Power & Halpin, 1998; Tomlinson, 2002; Biesta, 2004). This way of thinking introduces a logic which focuses on the users or consumers of the educational provision and a very suitable name for the consumer of education is, of course, «the learner».

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If the foregoing suffices as an indication of why the new language of learning may have emerged – and I wish to emphasise one more time that these developments are not the outcome of one underlying agenda, are not all necessary bad, and are to a certain extent simply contradictory – the next question to ask is what the impact of the new language of learning has been on the way in which we understand and speak about education. What is it, that can be said by means of the new language of learning, and, more importantly, what is it that can no longer be said by means of this language?

Against learning?

One of the main problems with the new language of learning is that it allows for a re-description of the process of education in terms of an economic transaction, that is, a transaction in which (i) the learner is the (potential) consumer, the one who has certain needs, in which (ii) the teacher, the educator, or the educational institution becomes the provider, that is, the one who is there to meet the needs of the learner, and where (iii) education itself becomes a commodity to be provided or delivered by the teacher or educational institution and to be consumed by the learner. This is the 'logic' which says that educational institutions and individual educators should be flexible, that they should respond to the needs of the learners, that they should give the learners value for money, and perhaps even that they should operate on the principle that the customer is always right. This is, without doubt, the world of *learndirect*®, where «you don't need any experience,» where computer-based learning shouldn't «bother you», and where «our friendly staff will be on hand to help you out». It also is the logic which implies that educators and educational institutions should be accountable, since what ultimately constitutes the relation-

ship between learners/consumers and providers is the payment that learners make, either directly or, in the case of state-funded education, indirectly through taxation.

In one respect it does indeed make sense to look at the process of education in these terms, at least, that is, in order to redress the imbalances of a situation in which education has been mainly provider-led and inflexible. Access to education has, after all, everything to do with such basic things as being able to attend school, college or university, and traditionally those groups who were not able to organise their lives around the requirements and timetables of educational institutions (women, most notably), were simply excluded from educational opportunities. Hence the importance of evening classes, open universities, and flexibility more generally. In this respect it is also clear that educational institutions and individual educators should indeed respond to the needs of the learners. To think of students as learners and of learners as customers can be a helpful way of achieving precisely this.

But the more fundamental question is whether the educational process itself can be understood – and should be understood – in economic terms, that is, as a situation in which the learner has certain needs and where it is the business of the educator to meet these needs. I believe, following Feinberg (2001), that this is not the case, and that it is for precisely this reason that the comparison between an economic and an educational transaction falls short. Why is this so?

In the case of an economic transaction we can, in principle, assume that consumers know what their needs are and that they know what they want. (The «in principle» is important here, because we know all too well how consumers' needs are manufactured.) Is this also a valid assumption in the case of education? It may seem that most parents know very well what they want from the school to

which they send their children. But this is only true on a very general level (and may perhaps only be true because there are strong cultural expectations about why children should go to school and what to expect from schools and schooling). But most parents do no – or not yet – send their children to school with a detailed list of what they want the teacher to do.[1]

Like:

Dear Miss, Please give Mary 30 minutes of mathematics instruction using method A, followed by 15 minutes of remedial teaching, and after that please 20 minutes religious education, and a bit of interaction with the other children in her class as well, please.

Parents send their children to school because they want them to be educated, but it is up to the professional judgement and expertise of the teacher to make decisions about what this particular child actually needs. Here lies a fundamental difference between what we could call the market model and the professional model. As Feinberg (2001, p. 403) explains:

In market models consumers are supposed to know what they need, and producers bid in price and quality to satisfy them. In professional models the producer not only services a need, but also defines it /.../ Sam goes to his physician complaining of a headache. Is it an aspirin or brain surgery that he needs? Only the doctor knows.

Would the situation be different in the case of adult learners? Presumably not. Adults may on average be more able to articulate what they want from education and hence what their needs are. But not only are there many cases in which adults precisely engage in education in order to find out what it is that they really want or need. We also shouldn't forget the many accounts of adults for whom engaging in education was a life-

transforming event, an experience through which they not only came to know what it was that they really wanted or needed, but through which they also found a new self, a new identity (which is not to suggest that finding a new self or a new identity was always a positive experience; classical examples of this can be found in the literature, e.g., Willy Russell's *Educating Rita*, and George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*).

The first reason, therefore, to be against learning – that is, to be against a language which makes it possible to present education in terms of «meeting the needs of the learner» – is that the underlying assumption that learners come to education with a clear understanding of what their needs are, is a highly questionable assumption. It both misconstrues the role and position of the educational professional in the process, and the role and position of the learner. It forgets that a major reason for engaging in education is precisely to find out what it is that one actually needs – a process in which educational professionals play a crucial role because a major part of their expertise lies precisely there.

The idea that education should be about meeting the needs of the learner is also problematic because it suggests a framework in which the only questions that can meaningfully be asked about education are technical questions, that is questions about the efficiency and the effectiveness of the educational process. The more important questions about the content and purpose of education become virtually impossible to ask, other, that is, than in response to the needs of the learner. As a result, these questions not only become individualised, since it is assumed that the learner knows – or should know – what he or she wants to learn and why he or she wants to learn it. On a wider scale questions about the content and purpose of learning become subject to the forces of the market. One effect of

this is that, in order to attract learners, learning itself has to be depicted as easy, attractive, exciting, and what not more, which is precisely what happens on the website of *learndirect*®. This not only undermines and erodes the role of educational professionals in discussions about the content and purpose of education. It also creates a situation in which there are hardly any opportunities left for democratic deliberation about the content and purpose of education and its role in society.

Now there may well be significant areas in which it should indeed be up to the individual learner to decide about the content and purpose of his or her learning. My point here is not to say that only some learning should count as legitimate and respectable. But I do believe that questions about the content and purpose of learning should also be part of the educational process itself – they are, in other words, important educational questions. I am, therefore, also saying that these questions should be seen as social and interpersonal questions, and not simply as questions of individual preference. Questions about who we are and who we want to become through education, although of immense importance to ourselves, are always also questions about our relationships with others and about our place in the social fabric. On a wider scale, questions about the content and purpose of education, are therefore fundamentally political questions. To leave an answer to these questions to the forces of the market, and we all know how manipulative markets are in order to secure their own future, deprives us of the opportunity to have a democratic say in the educational reproduction and renewal of society.

There are, therefore, two arguments against the new language of learning or, to be more precise, against a line of thinking that is made possible by the new language of learning. One problem is that the new language of learning facilitates an economic understanding of the process of education, one in which the learner is supposed to know what he or she wants, and where a provider (a teacher, an educational institution) is simply there to meet the needs of the learner or, in more crude terms: to satisfy the customer. I have shown why I think that such a depiction of the process of education is problematic. The other problem with the logic of the new language of learning is that it makes it difficult to raise questions about the content and purpose of education, other than in terms of what 'the consumer' or 'the market' wants. This, as I have argued, poses a threat both to educational professionalism and to democracy.

For these reasons I believe that we should be extremely cautious in using the language of learning. Not only because such use might undermine our educational professionalism, but also because it might erode an open, democratic discussion about education. But our attitude cannot simply be a negative one, and this is precisely why I believe that we need to reclaim – or rather: reinvent – a language of education which can serve as an alternative for the language of learning. To this task I will turn now.

From learning to education

I have argued that we shouldn't understand the educational relationship as a relationship between a provider and a consumer. But what, then, does constitute an educational relationship? And what kind of language would be appropriate to capture what is special about educational relationships? My answer to this question, a proposal for a language for education, centres around three interlocking concepts: *trust*, *violence* and *responsibility*; or, to be more precise: trust without ground, transcendental violence, and responsibility without knowledge.

Trust without ground

Where does education begin? It may, indeed, begin with a learner who wishes to learn something, who seeks knowledge, skills, qualifications, change, or adventure, and who seeks a way to learn this and per–haps even someone to learn from. We can of course try to put this whole process in neat boxes. The learner knows what he wants to learn, so the provider must make sure that it is precisely this, nothing more and nothing less, which the learner will learn. Hence learning contracts, hence accountability, hence inspec–tion and control, and hence *learndirect*®. As it says on their website: «learndirect is a brand new form of learning», «learndirect learning is designed with you, the individual learner in mind» (www.learndirect.co.uk/personal).

However, even if one engages in neatly organised forms of learning, there is always a risk. Not only is there a risk that you won't learn what you wanted to learn. There is also the risk that you will learn things that you couldn't have imagined that you would learn or that you couldn't have imagined that you would have wanted to learn. And there is the risk that you will learn something that you rather didn't want to learn, something about yourself, for example. To engage in learning always entails the risk that learning may have an impact on you, that learning may change you. This means, however, that education only begins when the learner is willing to take a risk.

One way to express this, is to say that one of the constituents of the educational rela–tionship and of education itself is trust. Why are risk and trust connected? Basically because trust is about those situations in which you do not know and cannot know what will happen. Trust is by its very nature without ground, because if one's trust were grounded, that is, if one would know what was going to happen or how the person you have put your trust in would act and

respond, trust would no longer be needed. Trust would then have been replaced by cal–culation. Trust, however, is about what is incalculable. This is not to suggest, of course, that trust should be blind. It is only meant to highlight the fact that trust structurally and not accidentally entails a moment of risk.

To negate or deny the risk involved in engaging in education is to miss a crucial dimension of education. To suggest that education can be and should be risk free, that learners don't run any risk by engaging in education, or that 'learning outcomes' can be know and specified in advance, is a gross misrepresentation of what education is about.

One could argue that the foregoing argu–ment depends on how one defines learning and also on what kind of learning is involved. After all, not all learning entails a similar amount of risk and some forms of learning may be quite predictable in their outcomes. Although I am inclined to argue that all learning may lead to unexpected change, and that for that reason there is no fundamental different between driving les–sons, an art history course or learning to write, it is indeed important to look at the way in which we define an understand learning itself. This then brings me to the second dimension of the language of educa–tion I wish to propose, a dimension called *transcendental violence.*

Transcendental violence

What is learning? Psychologists, both of an individualistic and a socio-cultural bent, have developed a range of different explana–tions of how learning, or more precisely: the process of learning takes place. Although they differ in their description and explana–tion of the process, e.g., by focusing on changes in the brain or on legitimate periph–eral participation, many explanations of learning assume that learning has to do with

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the acquisition of something 'external', something which existed before the act of learning and which, as a result of learning, becomes the possession of the learner. This scheme is what many people usually have in mind when they say that someone has learned something.

But we can also look at learning from a slightly different angle, and see it as a 'response' to a 'question'. Rather than seeing learning as the attempt to acquire, to master, to internalise, and what other possessive metaphors we can think of, we can also see learning as a reaction to a disturbance, as an attempt to reorganise or reintegrate as a result of disintegration. We can look at learning as responding to what is other or different, to what challenges, irritates and disturbs us, rather than as the acquisition of something that we want to possess. Both ways of looking at learning might be equally valid, depending, that is, on the situation in which we raise the question about the validity of a certain conception of learning. But the second definition is educationally the more significant, if it is conceded that in education we are ultimately concerned with questions about the subjectivity or, in more sociological terms, the agency of the learner (Biesta, 2003a).

While learning as acquisition is only about getting more and more, learning as responding is about showing who you are and where you stand. It is about what I have called elsewhere a process of «coming into presence»[2] (Biesta, 1999, 2001). Coming into presence is not something that individuals can do alone and by themselves. To come into presence means to come into presence in a social and intersubjective world, a world we share with others who are not like us. Coming into presence also isn't something that we should understand as the act and the decision of a pre-social individual. This is first of all because it can be

argued that the very structure of our subjectivity, the very structure of who we are is thoroughly social. Even, for example, when we utter words like «I» or «I wish», we use a language that in a fundamental sense is not of our own (Derrida, 1998). But it is also, and more importantly, because what makes us into a unique, singular being – me, and not you – is precisely to be found in the way in which we respond to the other, to the question of the other, to the other as question (Levinas, 1989, 1998; Biesta, 2003b).

If education is indeed concerned with subjectivity and agency, then we should think of education as the situation or process which provides opportunity for individuals to come into presence, that is, to show who they are and where they stand. What does it mean to provide such opportunities? It first of all requires a situation in which students, learners are indeed able to response, are indeed able to show who they are and where they stand. This not only means that there must be something that they can respond to, that there is a situation in which learning is not confined to acquisition and copying. It also requires that educators and educational institutions care about what their students think and feel and where they are allowed to express their thoughts and feelings. This does not mean, of course, that any thought or feeling should simply be accepted. Coming into presence is not about self-expression; it is about responding to what and who is other and different. Coming into presence is, in other words, thoroughly relational and intersubjective.

This means that coming into presence requires careful attention to hear and see what and who is other and different. Coming into presence is as much about saying, doing, acting and responding, as it is about listening, hearing and seeing. In all cases, therefore, coming into presence is about being challenged by otherness and differ-

ence. Teachers and educators have a crucial role to play in this, not only by confronting learners with what and who is other and different – and this raises crucial questions about curriculum and the social organisation of schools – but also by challenging students to respond by asking such fundamental questions as «What do you think about it?», «Where do you stand?», «How will you respond?» (see Rancière, 1991, p. 36; see also Masschelein, 1998, p. 144; Biesta, 1998).

Coming into presence is, therefore, not necessarily a pleasant and easy process since it is about challenging students, confronting them with otherness and difference and asking them difficult questions (Biesta, 2001). This suggests that, in a sense, there is a violent dimension to education, and I want to argue that it is important not to deny the violence involved in coming, or maybe we should say calling, into presence. Derrida, in a discussion with Levinas about what constitutes subjectivity, refers to this kind of violence as *transcendental* violence (Derrida, 1978). It is violent in that it doesn't leave individuals alone, in that it asks difficult questions and creates difficult situations. But it is precisely through this that coming into presence becomes possible. The latter is what Derrida refers to with the notion of 'transcendental' which, in the philosophical literature, denotes conditions of possibility, i.e., denotes what needs to occur if coming into presence is a possibility. Acknowledging the difficult character of education is, of course, a far cry from the world of *learndirect*® which wants to depict learning as something that is easy, without risk and without deep, transforming and disturbing challenges.

Responsibility without knowledge
If this is what constitutes an educational relationship and makes education possible, then it is immediately clear that teachers carry an

immense responsibility. This responsibility is more than a responsibility for the quality of teaching or for successfully meeting the needs of the learner. If teaching is about creating opportunities for the student to come into presence, if it is about asking difficult questions, then it becomes clear that the first responsibility of the teacher is a responsibility for the subjectivity of the student, for that which allows the student to be a unique, singular being. Taking responsibility for the singularity of the student, for the uniqueness of this particular student, is not something that has to do with calculation. It rather belongs to the very structure of responsibility that we do not know what we take responsibility for, if taking is the right word in the first place. Responsibility is unlimited, because, as Derrida argues, a limited responsibility is just an excuse to credit oneself with good conscience. He writes (Derrida, 1992):

When the path is clear and given, when a certain knowledge opens up the way in advance, the decision is already made, it might as well be said that there is none to make; irresponsibly, and in good conscience, one simply applies or implements a program... (p. 41)

It makes of action the applied consequence, the simple application of a knowledge or know-how. It makes of ethics and politics a technology. No longer of the order of practical reason or decision, it begins to be irresponsible. (p. 45)

This means, then, that the responsibility of teachers and educators for individual students or learners is not, cannot be based upon knowledge about what one takes responsibility for. Responsibility without knowledge is, then, the third aspect of the language of education that I want to propose. It is this dimension which makes the work of teachers and educators so difficult if, that is, they really engage with this responsibility and do not deny its existence.

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For education

In this article I have examined the new language of learning. I have given some examples and manifestations of this language and am sure that there are many more examples of the working of this language, not only in how others speak about education but maybe even in how we ourselves have come to speak about education. I have suggested that the emergence of the new language of learning should be seen as the unintended outcome of a range of different developments: new theories of learning, the postmodern critique of modern education, the silent explosion of learning and social and political transformations in Western societies, most notably the dismantling of the welfare state.

It should be emphasised that the developments that have led to the rise of the new language of learning are not all bad. New theories of learning have definitely had a positive impact on educational practice. The postmodern critique of modern education has effectively exposed authoritarian educational structures and practices. The actual increase of learning, the «silent explosion», is not necessary bad either, although it may have contributed to the idea that learning can be easy. I am far less positive about the social and political transformations, particularly the rise of neo-liberalism and the marketisation of education (for an excellent overview and critical analysis see Apple, 2000).

One way, therefore, to summarise my critique is to say that while the new language of learning has had a positive impact in some areas, it has proven to be a language very suitable for those who want to think of education in strictly economic terms, that is, as an exchange between a provider and a consumer. This means, however, that we, educators and educationalists, have ourselves contributed to the rise of the new language

of learning, often with the best intentions, but, as I have argued, with problematic consequences both for the way in which we understand the process of education itself, and for the possibility to have professional, educational and democratic discussions about the content and purpose of education.

This is why I have argued that we need to develop an alternative for the new language of learning and I have suggested some building blocks for such a language. I have emphasised that we should acknowledge that engaging in learning always entails a risk, and that trust is therefore an important constituent of educational situations and relationships. I have further argued that we should acknowledge the violent dimension of all education that is concerned with subjectivity and agency, or, as I prefer to call it, with the coming into presence of unique, individual beings. Central to my argument here has been the claim that we can only come into presence, can only show who we are and where we stand in relation to and, most importantly, in response to what and who is other and different. To expose students, learners to otherness and difference and to challenge them to respond is therefore one of the most basic tasks for teachers and educators. It is an extremely difficult task and implies a huge responsibility for those who dare to take on this task. This responsibility for the uniqueness, the subjectivity of students, learners, is an unlimited responsibility, that is, a responsibility that cannot be calculated. It is a responsibility without knowledge.

I began this article by emphasising that I wanted to make a modest contribution to the development of an educational language. My outline of a language for education should be considered in this light. It is a possible language to talk about education in a way that is different from the new language of learning, yet it is only one possibility that I wish to offer for further discussion and challenge. My hope is that languages such as the one suggested in

this article may function as critical reminders that education is, can be, and should be about something else and something more than what the learning managers, the learning facilitators, and the technicians of the new language of learning may want us to believe.

Notes

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1 It is interesting to see how the relationship between doctors and their patients is changing as a result of the availability of a vast range of medical information on the internet. This is not yet so in the case of education, though we should neither underestimate the power of the internet, nor the willingness if not eagerness of some educators and educational entrepreneurs to suggest, through advertising and the internet, that easy answers to educational problems are available.

2 The idea of 'coming into presence' as a central educational concept is meant as an alternative for the modern idea of emancipation as a process that relies on rationality and results in autonomy. It is an attempt, in other words, to articulate a «traditional» educational concern in response to postmodern and post-humanist challenges.

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