

Educational Governance Research 20

Michael Uljens *Editor*

Non-affirmative Theory of Education and Bildung

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Educational Governance Research

Volume 20

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Non-affirmative Theory of Education and Bildung

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ISSN 2365-9548

ISSN 2365-9556 (electronic)

Educational Governance Research

ISBN 978-3-031-30550-4

ISBN 978-3-031-30551-1 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30551-1>

This work was supported by Åbo Akademi University

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Why Engage in Non-affirmative Theory of Education and *Bildung*? A Preface

When nations are working through arduous and challenging times, during which major economic, social, cultural, technological, ecological or political developments are present, education receives our attention. Historically, we find many examples of how rethinking educational theory, philosophy, policy and practice has operated as crisis management. In Europe, a well-known historical example is the Prussian reform movement after the 1807 Treatise of Tilsit, concluded by the Russian Tsar Alexander I with Napoleon. As the other Prussian reforms relied on creating a new type of citizen, education received a central role. Wilhelm von Humboldt and Johann Gottlieb Fichte, with their ideas on *Bildung* at an individual and collective level, were influential in the reform of the whole school system, including the establishment of a new university in Berlin in 1810. In the aftermath of the treatise 1807, Russia occupied the eastern half of Sweden, making Finland a semi-independent Grand Duchy of Russia in 1809. As a result of this crisis, Finland was no longer part of Sweden but did not want to become Russian. Instead, a new nation was built from the inside out, explicitly with the help of *Bildung*. In 1852, Finland established one of the world's first and still continuing professorial chairs in education and Didactics to take care of secondary and upper-secondary teacher education. Other well-known crisis-driven developments of education systems occurred in Japan at the end of the nineteenth century and in the USA after the Sputnik shock in 1957.

Today, challenges that result in education reforms are often similar across nations. The Bologna process in the European Union and the OECD's PISA programme are good examples of this. Ecological sustainability issues and rapid technological developments obviously challenge us globally to rethink what it means to be an educated person and a responsible citizen. Moreover, challenges to democracy in the USA, Europe and other parts of the world requires us to rethink citizenship education. Do we see a stronger global division between authoritarian and democratic polities developing? The policy effects of the Russian war in Ukraine beginning on February 24, 2022, remains to be seen. In any case, after the demolition of the Iron Curtain in Europe at the end of the Cold War in 1991, a new one appears to

be under construction. Reflecting on Bildung in the twenty-first century requires both a nation-state and a globopolitan gaze.

While political initiatives often promote prescriptive or ideologically loaded education policies, we expect educational research not only to provide accurate empirical descriptions but also to develop conceptual languages, models and theories for critical analysis, offering starting points for empirical research and for cultural reflection of what it means to become, be and develop as humans. In the end, it is by educational theory and philosophy that we make sense of both practice and policy. It provides us with a language for communication within and across cultures, and it helps us develop our pedagogical thinking.

So, what kind of language enables teachers, policy makers, leaders and the public to identify, make sense of, express and talk about the complexity of education? What kind of educational theorising is capable of living up to such ambitions in today's world? What conceptual vocabularies do we need to provide?

This volume finds it worrying that even though we generally are content with the idea of living with parallel competing theories, there is a limit to how far it is meaningful to differentiate educational research. Given the increasing complexity of teaching, studying and learning in multiple contexts, education as a discipline runs the risk of dissolving into a conglomerate of disparate contributions, separate from and unable to relate to one another. Too disparate terminologies are not necessarily helpful in creating a shared language. However, we also witness an opposite tendency when approaching education with a very generalist terminology. This is typical, for example, when we reduce education from a discipline to *field of research* where educational research applies insights from other academic disciplines such as psychology, sociology, philosophy, economy, organisation theory, subject matter theory and politics. Although useful, initiatives that lack a genuine pedagogical language of education make us blind to the phenomenon itself.

For the critical reader, I want to emphasise that in no way is the above an argument against research specialisations. Yet, these specialisations need to be framed by or grounded in a genuine idea of what *education* is and must be, especially in a non-teleological cosmology where the future is dependent on individuals' and societies' own actions. To this end, this volume argues in favour of a stronger and broader *education* theory that helps us capture the complexity and paradoxical character of what it means to become a cultural human being and grow into and as a person. Instead of inventing a new language, this volume seeks to revisit and rehabilitate such a core approach that already exists in our own tradition: the non-affirmative tradition of theorising education and Bildung. In doing so, we must, however, start by taking a closer look at the challenges ahead and some frequently occurring answers.

For the time being, the COVID-19 global pandemic and the Russian unprovoked war in Ukraine that started on February 24, 2022, naturally appear as dramatic occurrences with consequences that we are perhaps not fully able to anticipate. However, other challenges have been more enduring. Our present-day globalised post-industrial economy and working life have become increasingly knowledge- and development-intensive, which has contributed to strengthening the role of

research and education as innovative vehicles for serving economic ends. This development has been increasingly visible for a large part of the past century. However, the revolutions of 1989, the fall of communism and the Soviet Union in 1991, the end of the Cold War, the unification of East and West Germany and the expansion of the European Union strongly contributed to the great faith and hopes that were placed in a market-driven view of how society would best work. The meteoric rise of the Chinese economy over the past four decades has strongly supported a new neoliberal order, although this was organised within a formally communist state. This neoliberal regime has had significant consequences for education worldwide. In particular, it has led to the increasing commodification of education, including privatisation and school fees, a focus on vocations and employability skills, school choice, and the transformation of curriculum policy work into a transnational issue emphasising outcomes, while neglecting to explore educational ideals more broadly worth striving for. These trends, or combinations of them, are visible in education policy and curriculum development.

On the one hand, we see many versions of applied neoliberal policies, one of the most radical of which is allowing the profit-making privatisation of public education in Sweden. The OECD's governance of schooling, which emphasises transnationally valid generic competencies, also exemplifies the movement towards a certain functional *performativism*. *Competency-oriented* curricula frequently deal with either *functionalist* societal needs or the needs of the learner by supporting the growth of her individuality and sociality, including her abilities. Often, these coincide, at least on a rhetorical level. Curricula following the needs of working life, including socially, culturally and politically relevant generic competencies, coincide with curricula starting from the needs of the individual and her personal growth. A crucial feature of such performativism or the instrumental competency view, is, first, that knowledge and values are considered possible to acquire as such. Second, acquiring them is a question of rather receptive learning behaviour. Psychological theories of learning typically meet the needs of such a view of school learning.

On the other hand, we see curriculum developments emphasising the value of distinct subjects, with a strong belief in the value of brute core knowledge. This sometimes occurs as conservative socialisation into the existing culture through the acquisition of given knowledge content and values. It may also appear as conservative socialisation into understanding the logic of different fields of knowledge: learning to reason historically, geographically or mathematically or learning to understand genres in literature, as a kind of *powerful knowledge*. In both of these cases, knowledge appear as external to the individual. Here, learning is primarily about acquiring this knowledge and not a process where knowledge is utilised to develop the learner's abilities.

The competency-oriented and the conservative content-oriented curricular approaches, and different combinations thereof, are visible in many countries around the world. From a historical perspective, the instrumental competency-oriented approach remind of what we historically know as a *formal theory of Bildung*, while the conservative content approach represents a so-called *material theory of Bildung*. The non-affirmative view on Bildung opposes both these approaches. In

the non-affirmative pedagogical Bildung paradigm, the contents also play a major role but reduce their role to serve as one of the elements of the pedagogical process. Here the contents is the medium for learning. Here, teaching aims at learning principled insight beyond the contents as such. The idea is to develop the learner's capacity to reflect on the logics of the field and to evaluate the meaningfulness of the contents, given the questions it aims to answer. In this view, the attainment of reflective ability never completely disconnects from the contents. Critical thinking is always being critical of something. A pedagogical treatment of the contents creates a reflective distance to the very contents itself allowing the learner to rethink their relation to the world, others and themselves. As the non-affirmative approach to Bildung values these latter aspects, pedagogical work aims at developing the student themselves, their will, their critical thinking and them as a person, but with the help of a reflective engagement with selected cultural contents. While the contents are a necessary key, they never remain as the only main point. Similarly, while curricula typically describe educational aims in general terminology, what these general aims mean and how they run across the knowledge contents must always be explored with the student, in terms of the selected contents. In the most recent national curriculum in Finland, the notion of *transversal competencies* refers to how general aims appear and what they mean in teaching different subjects to different age groups.

The Idea of This Volume

In order to meet the challenges and problems described above, this edited volume aims at advancing research on education with the help of critical, Bildung-centred, non-affirmative education theory, adopting professor emeritus Dietrich Benner's way of structuring the field as a shared point of reference. As Benner himself points out, in this volume, the constitutive principles of education (*Bildsamkeit* and *summoning* to self-activity) indeed represent the core of education theory since the modern classics and beyond. In Benner's treatment, these constitutive principles are explored in relation to the so-called regulative principles. Together, they make this approach fruitful as a general framework for understanding the dynamics of the relational teaching-studying-learning process and how this, in turn, relate to the dynamics between different societal practices. Such an approach is useful for a theoretical grounding of empirical research in education.

The intention of this volume is to explore how non-affirmative education theory, as a general theory of pedagogics or education (*Allgemeine Pädagogik*), enables us to rethink the contemporary approaches in education. As has been pointed out, this volume argues that we need to revisit core ideas that have eroded, especially during the recent decades of neoliberal performative functionalism and cultural reproduction-oriented conservatism. We need to move beyond a language that under-estimates knowledge-impregnated critical thinking, moral self-reflexivity and preparation for political citizenship. We need a language that is fruitful, not

counterproductive, for understanding how curricular and evaluative practices support education for democracy as well as cultural identity and political autonomy, yet without explaining what these are and should be upfront. We need a language that preserves the relative independence of schools and teachers, without subordinating teachers and schools to various political and economic interests by making teaching an instrumental competence and thereby de-professionalising teaching. We need a language that enables us to talk systematically and in a precise manner about teaching, studying and learning as the relational phenomena that they are.

Like other disciplines, education must simplify in order to identify and signify phenomena. But, how far can this be taken? Contemporary technological developments such as robotics and AI may come to overemphasise the communicative *methods* aspect of teaching. The same holds true for realist-oriented cultural conservatism emphasising the *contents* of teaching while forgetting about the more general educative tasks of schooling. In fact, the ideologically driven ambitions of education for social justice may fall into the same trap. If schools become sites for uncritically implementing predefined views of social justice, this may occur without pedagogically opening up the topic with and for the learner. Such teaching may turn out to be anti-pedagogical and counterproductive for the aim of developing the student's moral responsibility and will, political awareness and critical eye regarding knowledge interests and global ecological challenges.

The many reductionist approaches dominating educational research often accept education as a multi-level social phenomenon, but they are not always able to treat education as such a phenomenon. It is thus crucial to establish and promote a language of education that is able to identify the pedagogical dimensions of educational leadership activities at and between different levels. This book aims at offering a reasonable alternative, showing how non-affirmative theory of education can be utilised as a frame of reference for exploring teaching that supports the individual's growth, educational leadership and curriculum reform work. The expectation is that given the character of *General Pedagogy* (Allgemeine Pädagogik), the approach will offer a more comprehensive language of education. This position theorises *pedagogical* activity and how it influences human growth, without returning this relational process on ethical, psychological or sociological theory. It aims at exploring those unique pedagogically relevant core concepts of education and Bildung in a foundational sense.

While the world needs considerate subjects and citizens with a sound personal and cultural self-concept, critical disciplinary knowledge, the ability to recognise and respect differences, the capacity for self-reflexive moral action and a belief in the value of shared political action and participation, today's policies overemphasise the development of instrumental competencies. While performative policies frame education through instrumental economism, the Bildung-centred notion of citizenship, embraced by non-affirmative education theory, sees personal and collaborative autonomy as central. This non-affirmative approach to Bildung avoids focusing on generic competencies as such, as it avoids focusing teaching and learning the content as disconnected from developing the personality of the learner and from societal needs or the cultural content of teaching. While the performativist

agenda dominating economism emphasises learning content-neutral and instrumental generic competencies *or* content as such, the Bildung approach aims at general competencies that exceed specific content, while arguing that these competencies or abilities transcending content may be reached only *through* specific content. Specific content and principled insights are thus complementary or interdependent. What is general can be learned only through an example, while the *value* of an example is always dependent on the principle that it exemplifies, and what this principled insight may mean for the learner. Therefore, the idea of so-called *educative teaching* is violated if examples are learned without understanding what principle the content exemplifies. Thus, the selected examples need to be exemplary. In this way, non-affirmative Bildung-oriented teaching operates by connecting three levels: the content as such, the general principles that the selected content exemplifies given the epistemic field it represents and the learner's ability. Differently expressed, only by growing into the culture in a reflexive way, that is by own engagement, the individual may identify himself as a unique individual among others, and still share the world with others.

In addition to the previously mentioned character of general education or general pedagogy as a foundational discipline theorising institutional education in a more comprehensive way, there are also more pragmatic reasons for the volume in question. One such motive is that recently published volumes introducing and developing these ideas in German, English, Chinese, Spanish, Japanese, Swedish, Finnish, Norwegian and Danish have experienced an increasingly inspired response during the past decade. In addition to this expansion, there is a need to bring authors from different parts of the world together within this field, which this volume does.

The constitutive principles of non-affirmative theory represent the backbone of European or Western education theorising. With modernity, education classics like Herbart and Schleiermacher introduced these core principles in relation to a new societal order. Yet, non-affirmative theory of education and a related idea of Bildung, as a school of thought, has not achieved a widely recognised international position, for example in terms of framing empirical research in education. One reason may be that Anglophone research approaches have come to dominate education research globally. We see this as a missed opportunity.

Third, the core principles of non-affirmative theory, rooted in modern or classical education theory, building upon the ideas of Humboldt, Herder, Fichte, Hegel, Schleiermacher and Herbart, has inspired many subsequent developments. With their recognition of and preoccupation with the idea of education as an intervention in the learner's life-world (the summoning to self-activity), necessary for reaching cultural, moral and political autonomy, this tradition always emphasises that Bildung and education are phenomena that need to be conceptualised not one by one, but in relation to each other. Pedagogical theory thus embraces both theory of education and theory of Bildung.

Traces of the early modern ideas of pedagogy appear in very different positions, such as those developed by Vygotsky, Dewey, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer and Foucault, as well as other relationally oriented positions. Yet, an awareness of how these approaches relate to and draw on the tradition of non-affirmative theory of

education and Bildung is lacking on a broader scale. This volume intends to open up a global dialogue in this direction.

Fourth, today, a large number of initiatives in multi-level modelling of education explore the networked character of curriculum work and education. Among the approaches attempting to connect levels from the transnational to the local, we find Europeanisation research, actor-network theory, discursive institutionalism, refraction and curriculum theory and complexity theory. Only seldom do these approaches theorise the crucial normativity question in education. In fact, many of them were not even developed for the purpose of understanding education.

Non-affirmative theory of education (NAT) argues in favour of a third position beyond revolutionary activism and conservative socialisation. It reminds us that education and politics do not have to be either superior or subordinate to each other; instead, they can be non-hierarchically related. Consequently, NAT identifies curricular ideals in a political democracy as something resulting from a public dialogue involving politics, cultural reflection and professionals' opinions. NAT reminds us that while the education system as a whole must *recognise* and pay attention to existing interests, policies, ideologies, utopias and cultural practices, we do not expect education to *affirm* these interests. Not affirming various predefined interests that are external to educational practice means not passing these interests, knowledge, values and practices on to the next generation without making these phenomena objects of critical reflection in a pedagogical practice with students. According to NAT, citizenship education for democracy cannot only be about the socialisation of youth into a given form of democracy; instead, it must be accompanied by critical reflection of historical, present and possible future versions of democracy.

NAT sees that educational practice is mediational and thereby partly hermeneutic in character, especially in terms of being aware of and acknowledging the subject's own agency, experiences and life history. From a *normative* perspective, NAT therefore argues that in translating and enacting policy initiatives, administrators, leaders and teachers must *recognise* curricular aims and content; however, ideally, educators are not allowed to *affirm* these values, as affirming them would mean *not* educationally problematising their aims and content with students, thereby reducing education to transmitting the given values and content. While non-affirmative education does recognise the learner's life-world, this life-world is not pedagogically affirmed but instead challenged. Such a challenge however, can take many forms. It may occur by addressing the subject with questions, but also by the teacher taking a step back creating space for the students voices. This is how NAT explains the creation of pedagogical spaces allowing transgression. These spaces involve a critical reflection of what is, what is not and what might be. These pedagogical spaces are created by inviting learners to engage self-actively in discerning thought and experimental practice, involving the critical contemplation of content advocated by the curriculum as a policy.

As an analytical concept, NAT offers us tools for studying to what extent and how educators are expected to and do affirm ideals or how they position themselves as non-affirming educators. Educational justice would thus include recognising the

student's right to develop their reflected will, requiring the abilities of autonomous thinking, decision making and action, but in relation to others' interests.

A final word on democracy. Neoconservative and neonationalist movements in many countries around the world, not the least in Europe, clearly demonstrate a threat to the ideals of political democracy. For its part, the performative competency paradigm is not of much help in reflecting democratic political and ethical citizenship education. The competency paradigm bows easily towards policies reducing education to serve economist interests, leaving a broader view of citizenship or human dignity aside. While these two major education policies around the world dominate, it is unlikely we can expect them capable of contributing to dealing with some of the most urgent economic, ecological, political and cultural challenges at hand. It is in this connection, we see a possibility for a non-affirmative take on education and Bildung for rational, political, ethical and global citizenship. It offers us a language of education for becoming and being human, connecting the individual and the collective, the personal and social, the history and the future, ethics and knowledge.

Vaasa, Finland
September 2nd, 2022

Michael Uljens

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Part I
Introduction

Chapter 1

Non-affirmative Theory of Education: Problems, Positionings and Possibilities



Michael Uljens 

Abstract Non-affirmative education theory represents a contemporary interpretation of the longstanding European tradition of *Bildung* and *Bildung*-related theory of education. This introductory chapter begins with a broad view of non-affirmative theory of education and *Bildung*, as well as the motives for engaging in such a dialogue. Second, as this way of theorising education and *Bildung* starts from education as an academic discipline of its own, this introduction describes some of the typical questions raised within the German and Nordic traditions of general education (*Allgemeine Pädagogik*). Third, this chapter includes a short overview of the volume, describing its structure and the separate chapters.

Keywords Non-affirmative education theory · General education · *Bildung*

This edited volume contributes to the international dialogue on non-affirmative education theory. Non-affirmative education theory represents a contemporary interpretation of the longstanding European tradition of *Bildung* and *Bildung*-related theory of education. The number of scholars around the world interested in this approach is steadily growing. Non-affirmative education theory (NAT) is today not a limited German–Nordic research issue but a global one, reaching from the Americas to Asia and the Global South. The approach draws systematically on the modern tradition of *Bildung* and *Bildung*-related education theory, as developed by, for example, Rousseau, Humboldt, Herbart and Schleiermacher. In analysing features of this tradition, this volume critically reviews and develops it in relation to both subsequent theory and contemporary societal challenges. The volume not only highlights how non-affirmative education theory approach *Didaktik*, educative teaching, democratic education and social justice but also how it relate to phenomenology, sociology, hermeneutics, cultural-historical activity theory, discursive institutionalism, empirical research, educational leadership and

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M. Uljens (ed.), *Non-affirmative Theory of Education and Bildung*,

Educational Governance Research 20,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30551-1_1

governance and 21st century competencies. There is reason to believe that a non-affirmative approach offers us a pedagogically more distinguished language of education and human growth. Such a language enables us to reflect on and put words to what it means to become and develop as persons, human and cultural beings, and political citizens, as we search for a way beyond contemporary educational policies.

This introductory chapter begins with a broad view of non-affirmative theory of education and *Bildung*, as well as the motives for engaging in such a dialogue. Second, as this way of theorising education and *Bildung* starts from education as an academic discipline of its own, this introduction describes some of the typical questions raised within the German and Nordic traditions of general education (*Allgemeine Pädagogik*). Third, this chapter includes a short overview of the volume, describing its structure and the separate chapters.

Non-affirmative Education: A Long Tradition and Recent Developments

The version of non-affirmative education theory promoted by Professor Dietrich Benner, which takes its starting point in the 1960s, forms an important reference point for all the chapters in this book. It formulates a position beyond seeing education as either conservative socialisation or radical societal transformation. In this respect, non-affirmative education theory connects to the broad and long tradition of *Bildung*, where the pedagogical selection and treatment of the cultural content of teaching holds a key position. It is this cultural content and its pedagogical treatment, including the learner's own engagement with it that supports the individual's development into a unique person who, at the same time, shares the world with others.

The idea of non-affirmative education reaches back to Plato in that the teacher is not considered able to transfer knowledge or insights from outside; instead, the teacher can only turn the learner's attention and gaze, which requires the learner herself to be active in finding her way to knowledge. The idea of education as support for the learner to self-actively engage in learning received its modern shape from the 1760s onwards.

From the individual's perspective, *Bildung* is a lifelong process, while pedagogical interventions in this process, moulding the process itself, have many beginnings and ends. Non-affirmative theory reminds us that a *pedagogical* take on *Bildung* aims at inviting the learner to conduct self-reflexive activities aiming at reaching beyond existing ways of understanding, interpreting, valuing and acting in the world, but also to develop a morally reflected will directing a responsible way of living together others.

From the perspective of humanity, or from a generational perspective, education is an unending task. As modern education views the future as an unwritten book, education aims at working pedagogically with the child as an unknown subject to

prepare her for a future that we do not know. Both theological and teleological explanations of both individuals and culture were abandoned with the move to modern education. Modern education thus abandoned anything reminiscent of the Socratic solution to the paradox of learning – that learning should be about reaching something innate. In Plato's dialogue between Socrates and Meno, a young man aspiring to become a general, Meno asks how he can reach knowledge if he does not know what to look for. Yet, if he knew what he was looking for, he would not need to search, as he would already know it. The Socratic solution to the paradox of learning in Plato's dialogue is that while *teaching virtue* by bringing such insight from outside is impossible, as the teacher (Socrates) does not know what virtue is, *learning virtue* is possible, as it is about recalling something that we have access to within us. According to this ancient position teaching, instead of bringing knowledge to the learner from outside, bring the learner into a state of perplexity (*aporia*), making her doubt and become aware of her ignorance (Westacott, 2019). This nativist theory is paradoxical in that learning is to reach something that the learner already has: knowledge that was connected to the soul by birth. Still teaching was necessary in supporting the learner to be active herself in trying to reach *in-sight* into what she already bears within herself. While the modern view of teaching denies the nativist view of the origins of knowledge, it shares the view of teaching as a support for the learner's engagement in trying to reach beyond her present insights.

Rousseau, Herder, Humboldt, Fichte, Schleiermacher and Herbart, as well as education philosophers such as Johan Vilhelm Snellman in Finland (1806–1881), contributed to reformulating the dilemma of *Bildung* and education by introducing a set of principles and concepts making up the conceptual architecture of modern education. Much of our present-day educational theorising accepts the foundational assumptions developed by these and other early modern European educational theorists. For example, it is widely accepted that the individual *is* both anthropologically free and undetermined, yet humans are in need of education to *become* culturally free and able to act accordingly. In addition, most accept the modern idea that teaching only influences learning indirectly: teaching is mediated by the student's own activity, working with selected cultural content.

Did these developments eliminate the paradox of learning, as it existed in the Socratic nativist theory of *learning as recollection (anamnesis)*, which considers that certain concepts exist in the human mind from before birth? Further, did the *Bildung* tradition also eliminate the paradox of learning as explained by Christianity, where the human, on the one hand, is an image of God and, on the other, without knowing what this image is like, must strive for reunification with the creator? The modern *Bildung* tradition obviously denies both ways of *explaining* the paradox of what it means to both *be* human and *become* human. Differently expressed, the modern *Bildung* tradition assumes that humans *are* originally able to reflect while also in need of *becoming* able to reflect. The same holds true of intersubjectivity. It is true that we *already* share the world with others from the very beginning of life, but it is also true that we *come* to share the world by growing into it. In the same vein, we *are* originally capable of reflecting. This capability makes education

possible. At the same time, we need to *become* culturally reflecting, which makes education necessary.

With the establishment of the modern view of Bildung, the paradox of learning fundamentally changed, but it did not disappear as a paradox. Modern European education theory rewrote the paradox of learning. What made education possible was from then on the assumption that the subject *is* initially reflective, undetermined and self-active, but to *become* culturally reflecting and self-determined, education was indispensable and necessary. In this respect, education as *Erziehung* (educative teaching) is about the cultivation or civilisation of the subject, morally and intellectually. Yet, as Snellman (1861) reminds us, how the learner receives culture, is not a mere reflection of how it was passed on to her. Rather, the reception involves interpretation of its meaning and value, while the way the subject herself actively passes on culture is not an imitation of how she herself valued and interpreted it, when receiving it.

In educative teaching, the learner is invited into a kind of reflexive engagement with cultural content selected with pedagogical motives (i.e. content making sense to and through the learner). The selected knowledge is powerful both in terms of being exemplary with respect to what it represents and by allowing the learner to engage productively with it to transcend her experiences. In this process, the learner is *summoned* to self-reflexivity and self-activity (*Selbsttätigkeit*) under the assumption that the learner herself is actively doing the learning. In other words, she studies. While learning is a process, studying is an activity. However, this does not mean that the learner beforehand was passive, only becoming active due to the teaching, as if the subject's capability to act was a gift from the educator. Rather, the subject, sharing the everyday world with others and addressed by the educator, *is* already active and already a reflective being, as indicated by the concept of *Bildsamkeit*. What is then *Bildsamkeit*?

In this tradition of Bildung, Herbart saw *Bildsamkeit* as a core concept. It includes the *experiencing* subject's active *orientation* towards the world as a kind of noetico-noematic correlation. Here the act of experiencing is parallel with the object or content of experiencing. Only analytically, the act can be separated from the contents. This epistemological position assumes that the phenomenological subject and object are not separate but instead intertwined or interdependent. We can thus speak meaningfully only about the world as experienced by us. As the world *in itself* is unreachable, the idea of the human mind as such is an empty concept, yet displays itself as a capacity. In this interpretation of Bildung, it is argued that human thought can only be determined in relation to what it is not (i.e. content that is not produced by itself), although the meaning of an object is co-constituted by an experiencing subject.

For the emergence of the individual as a social and cultural being, social interaction is constitutive, as the subject identifies herself (i.e. becomes an object for herself) only by first being addressed by the Other. The origin of this line of thought goes back to Fichte's critique of the Kantian transcendental subject, a view further developed by Hegel. Today, this school of thought is perhaps best known as the

contributions of early American pragmatists such as George Herbert Mead and John Dewey.

Following this line of thought, personalisation and socialisation are parallel processes. A subject may recognise herself as unique in relation to others only by coming to share the world with others. In this tradition, *Bildung* sees human existence as involving an unending process of becoming. It is a processual and relational position regarding the Self.

Education *as summoning* (*Erziehung*) thus intervenes in the subject's active relation to herself, others and the world. *Turning* the learner's attention to these relations may help the learner transcend her existing lifeworld. This occurs by facilitating or inviting the learner into an active engagement with and rethinking her relation to the world. Such rethinking is of a sort that the learner would not otherwise have become engaged in. To make the learner's original experience an object of reflection in relation to something new contributes to the creation of a *pedagogical space* that allows the learner to change her gaze. In this sense, the self-activity that the learner is summoned to refers to a specific class of activities that we, for the sake of convenience, call *studying* – that is, those learner activities that relate to educative interventions.

Non-affirmative education theory emphasises moral freedom as a central aim of education. As the idea is that the learner learns to follow her self-reflexive will, rather than acting upon impulse or following conventions, educative teaching does not pass on culture affirmatively. Instead, educative teaching invites the learner into reflexive engagement regarding the meaning and value of the presented content. This meaning and value is created in a process by inviting the learner to actively engage with the content. Only such education that does not affirm circumstances as given may challenge the learner to turn her attention away from the self-evident and taken for granted. The pedagogical tasks presented by the teacher help the learner create a distance from her everyday experiences. In this sense, the modern notion of *Bildung* accepts *negative freedom* as liberating the subject by creating a reflective distance from conventions and the student's own everyday experiences. It means engaging the learner in reconnecting to the previously familiar, not only to connect new knowledge to something known but also to experience how new principled insights help her reach beyond her particularities. In this sense, education is elevating. Education differs from mere socialisation, which does not make a difference in terms of whether the learner develops her ideas of the world passively or through an independent, self-reflective and evaluative process of studying.

The conceptual challenges of the non-affirmative school of thought remind us of some of the assumptions of Plato. However, in its way of solving the paradox of learning, the position primarily draws upon *modern theory education* as developed from the beginning of the eighteenth century. With Kant, we came to understand that humans are not just abiding laws given to us; instead, humans are also the creators of laws. Given the idea of humanity as creating, preserving and changing moral conventions, learning in terms of socialisation into habits, conventions and traditions turned out to be inadequate. Understanding that norms are things that we can change and that conceptual knowledge is something that we can develop further

is not something that we can learn without turning our attention to this and reflecting on specific occasions of it. Learning in terms of *Bildung* takes us beyond socialisation to conventions. *Bildung* represents reaching a meta-perspective on conventional experience and knowledge. It is a sort of second-order learning, preparing for a collaborative discursive capacity to renegotiate knowledge, values and conventions.

From a broad perspective, a main movement in early modern European education theory was the change from a teleological to a non-teleological view of the individual and society. A significant contribution to this end was John Locke's idea of *tabula rasa*, opposing the idea of *original sin* as something planted in the individual. For Locke, humans are neither bad nor good from birth. In addition, modernist reasoning around education left the idea of *imago Dei*, which saw humans as an image of God who yet faced the task of reunification with the creator (*imitatio Christi*), which was assumed to make true human growth meaningful (Koselleck, 2002). Enlightenment *Bildung* replaced the creation myth that for so long had explained why humans were endowed with the capacities of rational understanding, deliberation, self-actualisation and self-transcendence.

With, for example, Humboldt and Herder, the modern idea of *Bildung* came to see human growth as something unending or as a lifelong task. As individuals, we have to learn to live with a *good life* as an open question, as F. D. E. Schleiermacher expressed it. Non-affirmative theory connects the question of a good life (ethics) with the knowledge learned in schools. School teaching thus always points beyond learning content as such, with its meaning and value. The idea is to support the learner's growth as an intellectual, moral, social, historical and political subject and her development as a person and citizen. Therefore, educative teaching summons the learner to personal engagement with selected cultural content in order to determine its meaning and value.

As knowledge is always an answer to questions, the task of teaching is to help the learner understand not only the answers but also the questions to which the knowledge is the answer. It is crucial that the learner becomes familiar with the ways in which we have answered questions thus far, but this must be accompanied by understanding that we may answer them differently in the future. In this sense, in challenging the learner's previous experiences and ways of explaining phenomena, existing knowledge possesses emancipatory power. The assumption is that knowledge helps us overcome the ways in which the world constrains us. Acquiring such insights emancipates the learner from her previous socialisation. In this, historical reflection is valuable. With the help of what knowledge were the given questions earlier answered? How should we answer them today?

Teaching that *points* at similarities and differences, to direct the learner's attention, may help the learner reach critical insights, that is, insights with a wide explanatory value. In such a process, the learner reaches so-called productive freedom and learns how to act in the world with her already existing resources. Yet, this is never done by uncritically passing on knowledge. On the contrary, while we use structured knowledge to problematise everyday experiences, the knowledge used for these purposes is also viewed critically. Differently expressed, while

non-affirmative education theory takes the questions and answers of historical positions seriously, in no way does it remain with the answers provided. In particular, university teaching aims at developing meta-theoretical insights in terms of epistemology, ontology and methodology. Meta-theoretical reflection allows us to make existing conceptual and empirical knowledge an object of reflection to determine in what respects it must be transcended.

Applying the above reasoning to education theory itself reminds us – and ensures that – progress in theorising education is possible, but in order to reach beyond what is, theorising necessarily requires insights into disciplinary history. Thus, one of the aims of this volume is to point to the disciplinary history and reveal how non-affirmative theory relates to that history, thereby offering us the possibility to critically evaluate to what extent such a theory is valid given today's problems.

Education Operates Indirectly

Non-affirmative education assumes that teaching operates indirectly, with learning mediated by the student's own activities. As learning cannot occur without the individual's own activity, teaching can only organise study opportunities. As teaching in this sense is an indirect activity with respect to learning, it is about *recognising* the learner as a unique subject with specific experiences, intentions and hopes. At the same time, teaching challenges the learner, provoking her experiences, reflective capacity and patterns of thought and questioning her knowledge by inviting her to engage with selected topics, tasks and learning content. Thus, while teaching *tactfully recognises* the subject in a broad sense of the word, non-affirmative teaching does not aim at affirming the student's previous experiences. It is, in other words, useful to keep up a difference between the concept of recognition (*Anerkennung*) and the pedagogical activity of summoning (*Aufforderung*).

However, to practise such summoning of the Other to self-activity, education must be tactful. For example, to listen to the learner can mean many things, but at the very least, it means *being* there *with* the learner. To listen thus means recognising and being open to the learner's experiences. Pedagogical listening means recognising the Other's right to her voice. Recognising the learner's right to reach and raise her own voice makes teachers and educators obliged to listen. In non-affirmative education theory, teaching is viewed as *summoning the Other to self-actively work on her own previous experiences with the help of the content of teaching*. Such summoning can occur in a number of ways. Most typically, summoning occurs by addressing the Other verbally. Summoning can also occur by being silent, thereby creating and upholding a space for the learner. The *act* of active listening offers the learner an empirical possibility to both realise and actualise her right to her own voice – the right that was recognised. Pedagogical listening is, as an interventional act, a *pedagogical provocation*. As a pedagogical provocation, we can, for example, ask the student about what something said means. We can ask the

student to compare her own views/ideas with somebody else's. In doing so, we recognise, without affirming, the learner's experiences. We try to open up a *pedagogical space* where we can, together, reflect, test, discuss and problematise things.

Finally, learning to listen is not only a capacity of the teacher but also something that teaching intends to promote among learners. To listen to a pupil means moving the attention away from our own perspective and taking our fellow human's ways of experiencing seriously. Developing such a sensitivity lies at the core of any moral education, as it includes the insight that the learner herself is a part of the world surrounding the other. To learn to view ourselves through the eyes of others and compare this vision with what we ourselves experience ourselves to be – or with what we ourselves want to be for the other – is a self-directed process of *Bildung*. To conclude, non-affirmative pedagogical practice consists of problematising interests external to school, including the learner's subjective lifeworld. Education is then mediating, in a non-affirmative sense, between these.

Sometimes primary socialisation is seen the task of the family, while a kind of secondary socialisation or emancipatory education is the task of the school. However, as Hegel pointed out in his *Philosophy of right* (§175) as children are free or indetermined, family upbringing in its positive determination has the aim of “instilling ethical principles into (the child) in the form of an immediate feeling for which differences are not yet explicit.” The negative determination of “raising children out of the instinctive, physical, level on which they are originally, to self-subsistence and freedom of personality and so to the level on which they have power to leave the natural unity of the family” (Hegel, 1952).

In claiming the right to question existing knowledge, and through the obligation to involve the student in activities of meaning making, non-affirmative education theory accepts *emancipation* as a task for public education. Thus, school teaching often aims at breaking with primary socialisation with the help of structured knowledge. In this respect, the idea is that school knowledge emancipates the learner from practices and ideas that she acquired in primary socialisation. In general, modern education theory shares the idea of *negative liberty*, which means liberating the learner from external restraints. Thus, while primary socialisation occurs by participating in everyday life, *educative teaching* turns this taken-for-granted experience of the world into an object of critical reflection. In this respect, non-affirmative education, in addition to accepting negative liberty, aims at *productive liberty*, where productive liberty or freedom refers to self-realisation and self-determination.

Although non-affirmative education theory is value-laden in defending *productive freedom* as something worth striving for, non-affirmative theory does *not* promote *positive emancipation*. From an educational perspective, the dilemma of positive emancipation is that such a practice does not limit itself to questioning one set of knowledge, principles and values or one specific view of the world, as is the case with negative emancipation. Instead, positive emancipation in addition aims at *replacing* these insights with another set of predetermined ways of viewing the world. Non-affirmative education thus avoids the risk of indoctrination or authoritarianism that may follow from positive emancipation, as it requires the learner

herself to work out what she thinks about the presented knowledge (Benner, 2015; Berlin, 1969, p. 132).

Yet, while it defends positive and productive freedom and takes a distance from positive emancipation, non-affirmative theory is not value-neutral or devoid of values. The pedagogical norm advocated by non-affirmative education theory considers that educative teaching should not affirm existing knowledge by passing it on in an unproblematised way to the learner. It does not deny that passing on a cultural heritage is a task for the school; but directs the attention to how this passing on occurs. This means that while school teaching in a political democracy recognises the legitimate aims and content formulated and selected in the curriculum, educative teaching has not only the right but also the pedagogical obligation to problematise this knowledge and its very worth. Only when teachers have the right to problematise given knowledge, teachers can help learners reach beyond learning certain specific pieces of knowledge and instead develop principled insights regarding the topic at hand. These educational aims, which promote the development of the individual's autonomy and include the teaching of critical and analytical thinking, presuppose a curriculum and evaluation system that is open enough for knowledge not to be affirmed. However, curricula in many countries around the world require affirmative teaching from teachers.

Beyond Societal and Cultural Reproduction and Transformation

Non-affirmative education theory is located beyond traditional ideologically and politically driven critical theories, but it also stands in stark contrast to politically and culturally conservative reproduction-oriented pedagogies and related instrumentalist views of learning aiming at developing instrumental competencies. Non-affirmative theory thereby avoids reducing education to an instrument for external interests whether these interests promote either societal transformation or societal reproduction. Such positions not only downplay the role of the subject in the pedagogical process itself, but also disregard the school's role in educating rational, ethical, politically autonomous and self-directed subjects and citizens who are able to live, together with their fellow human beings, with the meaning of a good life as an open question.

Indeed, the value of non-affirmative education greatly lies in how this theoretical tradition manages in a coherent way to clarify conceptually two rather straightforward, yet complicated questions. The first question deals with how we conceptually explain how human activity, identified as pedagogical activity, relates to human growth, learning and *Bildung*, particularly how the learner's own activities mediate pedagogical influences. The second question is how the relationally connected practices, pedagogical influences and *Bildung* conceptually relate to societal development at large, including politics, culture and the economy.

These two questions form the point of departure for any conceptual system worth calling an educational theory: (a) how do we explain the dynamics of the teaching–studying–learning process (Erziehung and Bildung; Uljens, 1997), and (b) how does education as a *societal* practice relate to other societal practices, such as politics and the economy. Although the questions appear simple, these questions point at a number of foundational philosophical issues: What makes pedagogical influence *possible* in the first place? What, if anything, makes such influence a *necessary* activity? What exactly, then, do we mean by *pedagogical* interventions in relation to all other kinds of influences occurring in human interaction that may also give rise to learning? Are there any specific kinds of learning that pedagogical activity aims at? Is pedagogical influence necessary for certain learning to occur? How do we engage with the dilemma that neither politics nor education can be subordinate or dominant in relation to the other? How do we educate for a future that is, in principle, unknown?

Other questions that non-affirmative theory seeks to answer are those related to normativity. The normative dilemma includes the question of how we think education *theory* should support practitioners. Should education theory, in addition to making the phenomenon of education and Bildung conceptually visible by providing an analytical language with which we can talk about private education experiences, also promote the aims and methods of teaching? Thanks to Herbart and Schleiermacher, we have been familiar for more than 200 years with the idea that education theory should offer professionals a language enabling us to talk about education more precisely. Does this mean that the theory must limit its task of functioning as an analytical tool to sharpen practitioners' reflection and offer them a language enabling communication? If education theory *is* by definition value-laden, does this mean that a theory should promote and prescribe only certain educational norms and practices, while not prescribing others? Is it really possible that a theory is, at some level, bound to certain values but still open enough not to replace the role of a democratically agreed curriculum?

This volume accepts that theories in human, social and educational sciences are not completely devoid of values. In such a morally loaded field of knowledge as education, value-neutrality is not a possibility. So, what exactly does being *value-laden* mean in educational theory? Does it mean that a theory of education should start from and build upon certain ethical theories? Perhaps value-laden instead means that we expect a *theory* of education to *explain* what norms and goals schools should promote. Perhaps normativity in education refers to promoting and developing the *learner's capability* in moral reasoning – that is, her will.

Non-affirmative theory first suggests that there is a difference between, for example, politics and education as societal practices. As these societal practices (politics and education) perform different things, they cannot conceptually derive from each other. We see them as standing in a non-hierarchical relation to each other, neither of them being subordinate or superordinate in relation to the other. Following such a view, political practice in a democracy would naturally influence what schools should aim at, but in doing so, politics would act in a self-restricted way. Consequently, while education would prepare students for future autonomous

participation in economic, cultural and political practices, it would carry out this task in a self-restricted way. Here, education would not perceive itself as superior to politics and imagine that it is the task of education alone to determine the future shape of society. Instead, education would prepare future citizens to act according to their own will, reflected in relation to others' ideas and views.

Non-affirmative Education as a General, But Not Universal, Theory

Non-affirmative theory of education and *Bildung* represent general or what was earlier named *systematic* education. What then is meant by *general education* or *systematic education*? General theory of education¹ has traditionally covered what in the Anglo–American world refers to both the theory of education and the philosophy of education (e.g. Uljens, 2002; Benner, 2015). More specifically, *general education* typically represents the ontological level of analysing the nature of education, aiming at foundational theory characterising cultural human growth in relation to pedagogical efforts (Herbart and Schleiermacher). The analysis of the central concepts in German general education, *Erziehung* and *Bildung*, reflects this intention. The German–Nordic tradition still owes very much to J. F. Herbart's way of approaching the problem, first explicated in 1806 in his *Allgemeine Pädagogik*. Herbart builds upon Rousseau, Kant and others, but his way of structuring the field in many respects set the stage for 200 years. In this tradition, education is not seen as a *field* of research, but as a *discipline* of its own.

The following questions comprise some of the main issues in general education and general educational theory:

1. What *are* human growth (*Bildung*) and education?
2. What makes education *possible*?
3. What makes education *necessary*?
4. What are the *limits* of education?
5. Is a *universal* theory of education possible?
6. How does education relate to *other disciplines*?
7. How does education relate to *other forms of societal and cultural practices*?
8. Can, and should, a general theory of education be *normative* regarding its aims and methods?

¹This refers to the German *Allgemeine Pädagogik* or *Allgemeine Erziehungswissenschaft*, the Swedish *allmän pedagogik* and the Finnish *yleinen kasvatustiede*. The first European chair in education operating without any interruption until this day was established in 1852 in Finland to serve the need for secondary school teacher education.

This list of questions is not exhaustive, but it fairly well reflects the orientation within general education, which draws, as the questions above clearly indicate, on philosophical reflection. Yet, even if general education is a theoretical exercise, the discipline of education is not limited to theory alone. It includes empirical research.

Traditionally, general education (Allgemeine Pädagogik) has taken its point of departure in a certain understanding of the relation between *generations*. The view of general education as dealing with the generational problem falls back on the modern interpretation of cultural change as ateleological, which means that there is no inherent aim (telos) that societal change is developing to. The indeterminate subject in an indeterminate world is to be educated, although both the educated subject and the future are, by definition, unknown. Philosophical anthropology alone cannot explain education. Instead, education explores what *becoming* human means, rather than limiting itself to establishing what *being* human means. A different way of expressing this point of departure is to recall that to be human is to be in a constant state of becoming. The shape of the future is also dependent on how existing and future generations act, so educative measures cannot be inferred from a world that we are determined to develop. In this respect, modern education is antiutopian. Instead, what kind of humanity we are striving for is constantly under negotiation.

General education investigates generational changes from both the individual's and the culture's perspective. The individual is to be educated so that she will become a mature member of society as well as an individual who is capable of contributing to the further development of the culture, as Schleiermacher formulates the position in his 1826 lectures (Schleiermacher, 1994, p. 38). The autonomous, mature individual, expressed by the German word *Mündigkeit*, operating on the basis of a reflected will, has thus become the ultimate aim of modern education. This aim is of no less importance in a political democracy and from a global perspective.

As a discipline, education is differentiated through a number of subfields and subdisciplines. With this expansion and differentiation of the field, there is reason to ask what role, if any, general education has for curriculum theory, didactics (Didaktik), subject matter didactics and other more limited initiatives in education. Today, general education (Allgemeine Pädagogik) exists in the tension between being a foundational discipline for all pedagogical subdisciplines and fields of research and, at the same time, being a specialised subdiscipline itself, primarily focused on an ontological, but not metaphysical, level of analysis. This means that positions regarding the ontological question of *what something essentially is* are cultural–historical, thus accepting the historicity of these ontological answers (Uljens, 2002). Thus, general education is indeed a specialisation, but it is a specialisation regarding foundational issues. The specialised subfields (adult education, special education, preschool education, vocational education, etc.) are then *fields of research* within education as a discipline. The subfields aim at developing *regional theories*. The relation between general education theories and various pedagogical subfield theories is reminiscent of the relation between philosophy and the social sciences: philosophy cannot answer the problems of the more specialised fields, while the subfields cannot manage without a philosophical level of reasoning.

In this respect, pedagogical subfields may have a relatively, but not completely, autonomous life. The specific fields of research reflect the general issues from their respective positions. Neither can replace the other.

The Hermeneutical Character of Education Theory

Educational policy and practice always reflect the current time and respond to identified needs. This is also true for education as an academic discipline and its theory. Studies in the history of ideas clearly demonstrate how educational theories change over time. Not only do they change over time; there also exist profound contemporary variations between, for example, the Anglo–American curriculum tradition and the German–Nordic tradition (*Bildung* and *Didaktik/didactics*). Therefore, we cannot understand theoretical outlines correctly, or evaluate their relevance, without reference to the culture and societies that they serve, explain and criticise. Accepting the historicity of education theory reflects a hermeneutical epistemology in human, social and educational sciences.

From this, two things follows. First, when we want to evaluate theoretical proposals, it is necessary and valuable to describe some of the educational *tasks* and *challenges* that we experience in our world of today. After all, as it is such questions that we expect theory to explain, we need to compare how different positions provide answers to a given set of questions. Second, even if we deny the possibility of temporally and culturally universal education theories in principle, we may still claim that more or less *generally valid* explanatory conceptual systems are both possible and meaningful. To defend the meaningfulness of general approaches does not mean that we claim that they have ontological superiority over other general systems. Contemporary conceptual plurality thus requires researchers to be *theoretically multilingual*. This volume argues that a global dialogue on education theory, carried out by representatives from different cultural traditions and political realities, is supported by a non-affirmative mindset. This means that participants in such an international dialogue duly *recognise* Others' voices but do *not affirm* them as such. Rather, we each interpret these ideas based on our own tradition, but with an open mind, allowing strong arguments to play their role.

What does not follow from an *epistemological* stance, such as hermeneutics, is that the question of *what* education in itself is or should be, cannot receive any answer. From a general theory of knowledge (epistemology), we cannot deduce education theory. Rather, we must turn to *regional ontological* analysis to define the object or the phenomenon in question. This is exactly the strategy applied by non-affirmative theory: the position explores the essential character of education, teaching, studying and learning in its own terms. It does not find the basis of such theory in ethics, psychology or sociology, nor in epistemology or a general philosophical anthropology. Yet, there has always existed a temptation to apply reductionist ways of conceptualising education and its aims and methods as a societal practice. This volume, however, refutes the view that education theory can develop out of such

fields of knowledge. Rather, education is a cultural and societal practice requiring theory of its own.

This volume thus argues that, as an academic enterprise, one task of educational research is to contribute through the development of theory within education as a discipline of its own. In this respect, education is like jurisprudence/law, political science, economics, religion and medicine. Education is not just another field of empirical research or field of knowledge. The danger of developing education starting from other disciplines, such as ethics or psychology, is that such a strategy can only result in normative or prescriptive propositions and principles. No *theory* of education can come out of such research.

Another way to explain the present position is to observe that just because we are able to identify pedagogical dimensions in health care practice, politics or economics, we do not imagine that it is possible to explain these practices with a theory of education. Consequently, just because there is a psychological or ethical dimension present in pedagogical practice, we do not reduce education to ethics or psychology. While we may think that education theory is necessary for understanding education, this does not mean that we are blind to the value of applying organisational, institutional, psychological, ethical and other perspectives to complete our understanding of education as a societal phenomenon.

This Volume

This volume comprises five themes. In addition to this introductory chapter, the main contribution in Part I is Dietrich Benner's chapter laying out significant features of affirmativity and non-affirmativity in education and *Bildung*. Reminding us that the discipline of general education requires *both* theory of *Bildung* and theory of education, the non-affirmative position represents a unique way of relating these theories to each other. Besides clarifying how non-affirmative pedagogy builds upon the idea that all education operates indirectly via the student's own activity, the chapter explains the implications of an ateleological view of the future. If education is seen, not only in terms of individuals' growth towards moral, rational, cultural and political self-determination, but also in terms of cultural development from an intergenerational perspective, where the future is what it will be constructed to become, reproduction and transformative theories of education are inappropriate. The non-affirmative approach offers a third position taking us beyond traditional traps in theorising education. The chapter reminds us that non-affirmative thinking in education is not a revolutionary position but rather a contemporary interpretation of the modern tradition, which, in many places, has been lost as a point of reference.

After an introduction to the main features of the approach, Part II continues with a close reading of how this approach appears from the perspective of teaching or *Didaktik*. First, in Chap. 2, *Thomas Rucker* locates how non-affirmative thinking is represented more broadly among German education theorists, working his way towards opening up the notion of *educative teaching*. In Chap. 3, *Ling Lin* analyses

in detail Herbart's classical theory of *educative teaching* and uses this as a critical point of reference for reflecting on contemporary education policies and practices. Ling Lin successfully demonstrates the validity of Herbart's view in today's world. In the last chapter of this section on Didaktik, *Michael Uljens* carries out a non-affirmative reading of *reflexive school didactics*. Here, Benner's constitutive and regulative principles in non-affirmative education theory are utilised to revisit and rethink a previously developed position in *school didactics*.

Part III highlights how non-affirmative theory differs from and demonstrates similarities to four globally recognised approaches to education and Bildung, which partly share the same roots. On the one hand, these chapters are constructive contributions in further theorising education and Bildung, along with the ideas of non-affirmative education. On the other hand, readers who are already familiar with these four approaches may find this section to be the key for approaching and understanding the unique features of the non-affirmative approach.

In the first chapter of this section, *Andrea English* highlights the connections between Deweyan pragmatism and non-affirmative education theory. Andrea English exemplifies these connections by discussing how listening as a pedagogical act reflects both recognising and summoning the subject. The second chapter in this section starts by observing that both the learner's activity (Bildsamkeit) and pedagogical activity (summoning) feature a hermeneutic moment. *Michael Uljens* and *Mari Mielityinen* show how education, as summoning to self-activity and Bildsamkeit, mediates between, on the one hand, subjectivity and intersubjectivity as foundational assumptions regarding human existence and, on the other, experiential notions describing what it means to be and develop as an encultured human being.

In the next chapter, *Juan José Sosa Alonso* analyses the relation between justice and education. He sees the value of a distributive approach to, for example, social justice but reminds us of the limitations of such an approach in education. By returning to Plato's way of dealing with justice as virtue, Juan José Sosa Alonso, via a detour to Gadamer and Foucault, demonstrates that the non-affirmative approach is fruitful for dealing with justice as a pedagogical virtue. In the final chapter of this third section, discussing non-affirmative theory and related approaches, *Johannes Türstig* and *Malte Brinkmann* explore the possibilities of a position that bridges the subject-centred phenomenological tradition and the sociological tradition of Bourdieu, which emphasises tradition and the role of the collective.

Part IV turns the attention to how non-affirmative education can support empirical research. Three contributions highlight how the validity of non-affirmative theory is not limited to an ontological or systematic analysis of the essential characteristics of Bildung and pedagogical work. In the first chapter of this section, *Hanno Su* and *Johannes Bellman* apply non-affirmative education methodologically, considering the approach as valid and meaningful for developmental research in education. They demonstrate that non-affirmative education theory and Bildung feature a certain kind of pedagogical experimentalism due to the relational nature of summoning and Bildsamkeit. This interpretation, they argue, is strengthened by the principle of verification: how did the pedagogical process turn out, given the intentions? The point made is that this experimental and non-determinate nature of

education in fact corresponds with open-ended intervention research supporting school development.

In the next chapter, *Alex Mäkiharju*, *Petra Autio* and *Michael Uljens* continue with the same issue but from a different angle. They carve out a new field of comparative dialogue between non-affirmative education theory and cultural–historical activity theory. While the latter is globally well known and utilised as a point of departure for intervention-oriented research and research-supported developmental work, the position share surprisingly many foundational assumptions with non-affirmative theory. The strength of the non-affirmative approach is its capacity to provide a language of education, while cultural–historical activity theory is considered equally valid for developmental processes occurring in any context. In the third and final chapter of this section, *Ann-Sofie Smeds-Nylund* directs our attention to educational leadership, typically overlooked in the literature on education theory and *Didaktik*, despite recent developments that demonstrate how central this activity is. While it is typical to ground leadership research in organisation theory, such an approach is educationally mute or blind. By contrast, *Ann-Sofie Smeds-Nylund* demonstrates how discursive institutionalism may add fruitful aspects for understanding leadership, if only there is a language of education at the bottom.

Finally, Part V concludes the volume by broadening the critical focus. This part reflects the possibility of viewing non-affirmative theory of education and *Bildung* as a critical voice challenging contemporary educational policymaking, governance and leadership of schools. *Bangping Ding* demonstrates how the non-affirmative approach helps us characterise the developments in *Didaktik* and curriculum in China over the past 100 years. The argument is that while China throughout its more recent history has adopted foreign policies and positions, thereby affirming these, the present way of relating to various positions reflects a more non-affirmative stance. The chapter represents a voice opening up non-affirmative theory of education as a relevant alternative for future developments in China.

Continuing a sort of reflective dialectical reasoning between various positions, *Armend Tahirsly* raises the provocative question of whether there is a need for mutual recognition between the non-affirmative *Bildung* discourse and the prevailing competency discourse. The discussion points at certain similarities, thus helping to sharpen the argumentation relating the notion of competence in the prevailing competency discourse to the notion of content-transcending abilities in the *Bildung*-centred discourse. Next, *Andreas Nordin* points at the normativity built into data-driven curriculum policies. He sees the non-affirmative approach as an alternative, albeit combined with discursive institutionalism, as a language for researching vertical policy transfer.

This section concludes with *Lejf Moos*'s characterisation of an outcomes-based discourse and a democratic *Bildung* discourse. Through this chapter, we return to the perspectives pointed out in the introduction. As the world stands now, with our shared challenges, the chapter identifies the limitations of the outcomes-based discourse and the possibilities of the democratic *Bildung* discourse that is advanced in and by non-affirmative education theory.

In the final section of this volume, *Michael Uljens* returns to and summarises the aim of the volume, as well as some of the main arguments. The chapter brings together the core themes developed throughout the chapters. The points made show in what ways a Bildung-centred non-affirmative theory of education provides for a theoretically elaborate and convincing foundation for understanding and practising education and Bildung in today's world.

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Chapter 2

On Affirmativity and Non-affirmativity in the Context of Theories of Education and Bildung



Dietrich Benner

Abstract This chapter describes the genesis and reception of my attempts at developing a non-affirmative pedagogy in four sections. The first recalls the beginnings, which identified non-affirmativity as a feature of critical pedagogical thought and action, leading beyond the then widespread juxtaposition of affirmative and emancipatory pedagogy. The second section presents the yield of these efforts on my “General Pedagogy” (1971/2018) and the basic pedagogical concepts, basic pedagogical theories, and elementary forms of action in education that I introduced in it. The third part develops systematic distinctions between positive and negative experiences, teaching and learning, and between upbringing, education, and competence, which are helpful for understanding the inherent logic of pedagogical thought and action and for the coordination between pedagogical theory and research in educational science. The fourth section deals with the reception of the approach and works out an enduring significance of critical non-affirmativity, which must be constantly re-examined against the background of changing pedagogical problem constellations.

Keywords Affirmativity · Non-affirmativity · General pedagogy · Inherent logic of pedagogical thought and action · Systematic distinctions between positive and negative experiences · Teaching and learning · Formation · Competence

The meaning of the terms “affirmativity” and “non-affirmativity” in the context of educational theory and research is not self-evident. The terms refer to commandments to avow or disavow something particular. But on what grounds should one be commanded to avow and disavow? This question is especially relevant when

Dr Aline Nardo (University of Edinburgh) provided immense support in the process of translating this text from German to English.

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M. Uljens (ed.), *Non-affirmative Theory of Education and Bildung*,

Educational Governance Research 20,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30551-1_2

considering educational contexts, in which the ability to judge whether something should be approved or disapproved – hence stating “yes” or “no” – is not only an important developmental step for children, but also a continuing task for adults throughout their lives.

Some argue that children do not learn reasoned avowel and disavowel at the same time as they learn to use the terms “yes” and “no,” especially the word “no.” But even this idea is controversial. Even at a young age, children encounter situations in which a simple “yes” or “no” is insufficient, for example, when a child who has learned to eat independently, without the need to be fed, is asked whether she wants spinach or cabbage, and answers that she wants carrots. Or, anecdotally, in my family, when my mother remarried after her first husband’s death, the priest, who became our stepfather, and he asked my brother and me (when we were 4 and 6 years old) whom we liked better, our mother or our new father. The priest’s intention had been to find out whether the new father had been integrated well into the family. Naturally, my brother and I did not want to offend either parent by taking sides. Thus, while I remained silent, my younger brother answered spontaneously not with “yes,” “no” or with “I don’t know,” but with an emphatic: “You!” which could only mean that he preferred the priest as a parent – an answer which, of course, nobody believed.

These examples show that when faced with a choice between fixed alternatives, children are able to choose an entirely different third option from an early age. Perhaps children are not always able to respond in such a way, but the situation permitting, they may exercise the freedom to choose something else. When given the choice between a red and green boiled egg in the Easter egg basket, for example, the child could choose the chocolate egg lying next to the others instead. In cases where there is freedom at play a choice must not be only between a yes or a no, that is, between confirming or negating something given, but rather can involve a third option (cf. Benner, 1987, p. 30; 2015, p. 41).

In the following, “affirmativity” and “non-affirmativity” are not introduced as formal-logical concepts with the purpose of merely distinguishing between affirmative and negative statements. Rather, the terms are to be interpreted in the context of *reflective* teaching-learning processes (*Lehr-Lernprozesse*) in which subject matter cannot be taught and learned through commandments to affirm or disavow. In such reflective, educational and educative-formational processes (*Erziehungs- und Bildungsprozessen*), the *tertium non datur* of formal logic becomes a *tertium datur*. This “third possibility” is not fully and finally determined; it must be continually clarified through further experiences, assessments and reflections on the part of both teachers and learners (see Heinrich, 1970).

Below, I bring together fragments from different theoretical traditions that were developed in attempts to confront dogmatic affirmative pedagogies. In doing so, my aim is to work towards a non-affirmative understanding of education as a process of: educating another person through education (*Erziehung*); formation (*Bildung*); and teaching-learning processes (*Lehr-Lernprozessen*) within pedagogical institutions. I do not claim to have invented pedagogical non-affirmativity, rather my thinking is based on classical texts that have guided and inspired me. Developing these

connections is what makes working on non-affirmative pedagogical experiences, forms of argumentation, and plans of action so interesting and exciting. The aim of my own work on non-affirmativity has not been to draw strict boundaries between different traditions of thought, but rather to reflectively discover new connections that are otherwise obscured by scholastic approaches.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The *first* section summarises attempts to identify non-affirmativity as a characteristic of critical pedagogical thought and action. It is based on an examination of both affirmative concepts of education and emancipatory concepts of *Bildung* which I worked on between 1978 and the late 1980s and subsequently expanded on in the context of my investigation of traditional and contemporary “Key trends in Education Science” (see my book *Hauptströmungen der Erziehungswissenschaft*, Benner, 1973/2001). The *second* section addresses the results of these efforts as laid out in my book on philosophy and theory of education (*Allgemeine Pädagogik*, 1987/2015). Therein, I systematically analysed the history of educational ideas in order to differentiate between affirmative and non-affirmative theories of pedagogical action, and as well as between dogmatic and transformative-reflective forms of pedagogical practice. In the *third* section, I turn once again to historical examples of the concept of non-affirmativity in theories of education and *Bildung* (*Erziehungs- und Bildungstheorie*). Therein, I introduce fundamental and systematic distinctions necessary for developing the inherent logic of *pedagogical* thought and action. I conclude this section with reflections on possible connections between concepts of pedagogical action and concepts of educational research, which is oriented on classical paradigms. In the *fourth* section, I take up critiques of my notion of a philosophy of education and pedagogy that is empirically sound. In closing, I work towards a concept of “critical non-affirmativity,” which is characterized by the need to be constantly redefined in the face of new problems and questions.

On Initial Attempts to Identify Non-affirmativity as a Characteristic of Critical Pedagogical Thinking and Action

The idea of reflecting on the difference between affirmative and non-affirmative education and transformation (*Erziehung* and *Bildung*) – and thus also between affirmative and non-affirmative functions of educational institutions – emerged in the second half of the 1960s. At that time, I was studying philosophy in Vienna with my friend and fellow student Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarzik, who, like me, was an assistant at the Department of Pedagogy at the University of Bonn. During that time, we became acquainted with Pedagogy and the newly emerging “science of education” (*Erziehungswissenschaft*) (cf. Benner, 2014). At the time, emancipatory education was discussed mainly in the German-speaking context, in particular by Klaus Mollenhauer, Herwig Blankertz and Wolfgang Klafki. Hans-Jochen Gamm

and others added a materialistic dimension to the discussion. In the context of this discourse, we began to discuss some of the fundamental questions surrounding educational theory and pedagogy. We sought to clarify theoretical and practical differences between pedagogical action, theories of pedagogical action, and educational research, difference which, in our opinion, neither the traditional nor the new studies of pedagogy had adequately addressed (cf. Schmied-Kowarzik & Benner, 1970, written for the most part by Schmied-Kowarzik, and the subsequent studies by Schmied-Kowarzik, 1974 and Benner, 1973). While in Mollenhauer, Blankertz and Klafki their critical reflective approach in developing concepts of emancipatory reform was apparent, in Gamm, whose arguments were far more sensitive and thoughtful, attempts to legitimize emancipatory education from an anthropological perspective, and to place it in the service of political anticipation, became central – this became particularly clear to me in my personal conversations with him. Gamm proposed that when new school buildings were built, “rooms should be created in which pupils of both sexes could be unmonitored and have the opportunity of erotic communication” (Gamm, 1970, p. 78). He used psychological and political reasons to justify such an extension of the tasks of public education to include the introduction and practice of “tenderness” and “love.” His psychological justification amounted to interpreted freedom as the holistic expression of a “unity” in thinking, feeling and acting, rather than as the individual’s inner, judgement-mediated freedom from impulse (see the statement in Gamm, 1977, p. 106). His political justification put emancipatory education at the service of a “socialist transformation of society” (see a critical analysis of this by Müller, 1992; see also Oelkers, 1989).

In my lecture at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Bonn in 1970,¹ I discussed additional connections between “Education and Emancipation” (*Erziehung und Emanzipation*). In that lecture, I did not refer to Gamm’s work – which was still unknown to me at the time – but drew from concepts of emancipatory education referencing Jürgen Habermas. My lecture developed the argument that emancipation cannot be a legitimate aim for pedagogical action, as it sets the task of the educator to be freeing the younger generation from existing cultural norms by imposing on them the orientations of their educators. Instead, I proposed to counter the idea that emancipation occurs when the younger generation had adopted predefined orientations of their educators, and argued instead that emancipation is attained when learners are able to enter transformational educational processes (*Bildungsprozesse*) that are not predetermined by their educators (Benner, 1970). Understood correctly, emancipation is not liberation *through* education (*Erziehung*), but rather liberation *from* particular forms of pedagogical dependencies and the need for pedagogical guidance and support.

I proposed a similar correction to the idea of emancipation for the then newly established discipline of educational research (*erziehungswissenschaftliche Forschung*). At the time, a new discussion had emerged that viewed empirical

¹This lecture was given when I was granted my postdoctoral degree; in the German tradition, this is called Habilitation.

research in education from an emancipatory perspective. This discussion was based on the critical theories developed by Habermas, Mollenhauer, Blankertz, and Klafki, who, together with Ilse Dahmer and others, had initiated a departure from Pedagogy (Pädagogik) as a discipline rooted in the humanities, an initiative developed by Erich Weniger (cf. Dahmer & Klafki, 1968). Instead of viewing pedagogy as a discipline in the humanities, they proposed a research paradigm for educational research (Erziehungswissenschaft) that linked empirical approaches with hermeneutical methods, arguing that such a shift would be in the interest of emancipation from existing forms of domination. My objection to their approach was that their interest in emancipation was not sufficient to justify interpreting scientific-nomological and historical-hermeneutical knowledge pedagogically. I criticised that the meaning of these connections could neither be determined empirically, hermeneutically, nor simply politically. In my book “Key Trends in Education Science” I later explained that Habermas’ project of combining philosophical analysis and enlightenment and social-scientific enlightenment and emancipation (cf. Habermas, 1965) did not elevate critical philosophy and educational theory (*Bildungstheorie*), but rather made them fall behind important developments established in the intellectual tradition (cf. Benner, 1973, pp. 289–299; 2001, pp. 280–292; see also the more far-reaching sceptical, precondition-critical problematization in Ruhloff, 1983). Let me explain.

With my argument for non-affirmative education (*Erziehung* and *Bildung*), I did not advocate for the affirmation of the existing order, nor against changes to this order. Rather, I tried to develop a stance that went beyond these prevalent opposing positions. I sought to develop an alternative position grounded in a concept of education that does not seek to educate the next generation to affirm the existing order. Equally, it does not seek to educate the next generation to affirm a future order anticipated by the educators themselves. I believed that non-affirmative education, which was still in the process of being developed, prohibited both of these forms of indoctrination. I argued that young people ought not to be educated to affirm the status quo or an alternative future envisioned by pedagogical actors. Instead, education ought to enable young people to actively participate in debates on what should be preserved and what should be changed. A form of education (*Erziehung*) that aims to engage young people into such discourses can only be “non-affirmative.” Its aim cannot be to anticipate the results of educative-formative processes (*Bildungsprozesse*). Instead, its aim is to introduce young people to an ongoing debate that plays itself out, not merely amongst the adults themselves, but also between the generations. The outcomes of such a debate should not be allowed to be determined through education (*Erziehung*) (cf. the similar, but not identical criticism of education in Arendt, 1958). It was only much later that I realized that my criticism of Klaus Mollenhauer was unjustified, because early on, he had advocated in favour of transformational emancipation processes that kept the future open and did not aim to affirm specific outcomes (for the correction of my Mollenhauer criticism, see Benner 2000, 1973/2001, 4th edition, p. 307).

An opportunity to test my idea of pedagogical non-affirmativity arose in January 1978 at a “Forum” in Bonn-Bad Godesberg on the subject of “Courage for

Education.” At this meeting, University of Zurich Philosophy Professor Herman Lübke put forward a nine-part argument against the emancipatory pedagogy of the 1960s and early 1970s, which were grounded in a contrast between affirmation and emancipation. Just a few days after the presentation of Lübke’s nine theses, some of the members of University of Münster’s Department of Education and School Theory (in the Institute of Educational Science) and I began to formulate our “Responses to the Bonn-Forum ‘Courage for Education’” (see Benner et al., 1978). Our response was published in the same year as the “Forum” in Bonn took place (cf. *Courage for Education*, 1978). The responses were written not only by members of the aforementioned department, but also contained the audio transcript of a presentation in which the educational researcher and school reformer Hartmut von Hentig from Bielefeld University had problematised the general thematic direction of the Bonn-Forum and some of the theses presented there (see von Hentig, 1978).

Our response did not defend emancipatory pedagogy against the theses of the Bonn-Forum. Rather, we tried to show that the theses were based in the ideology of an affirmative education. Although the theses provided justified critique of Gamm’s argument, in the sense that they justified a critique of certain education concepts of an emancipatory pedagogy that attempted to guide young people to affirm the ideology of their educators, the proponents of the Bonn-Forum followed a specific definition of successful education based on their own vision of desirable practices for educating future generations. At the Bonn-Forum, however, the dogmatic contrast of “true” or “false” views undergirding the theses had been presented as truths. They had articulated simplistic answers to difficult questions, for the clarification of which only differentiated reflections would have been necessary. In a public debate with Hermann Lübke, which took place during the 17th discussion on education policy at the Werner Reimers Foundation from May 3 to 5, 1979, he “once again” defended the theses identifying them as “reminders of important trivialities” (Lübke, 1979, pp. 3–4). In contrast, in my retort, I referred to the “lack of pedagogy at the Bonn-Forum” and referred to Robert Spaemann’s advocacy for critical reflection to be applied to the theses themselves and the other contributions presented at the Forum.

In his presentation at the Forum, Spaemann had explained that if correctly understood, “courage to educate” requires “work on nonrelativistic beliefs” that “cannot be taken up as the purpose of education.” His lecture ended with the question: “What does ‘courage to educate’ mean?” His answer was: “A scoundrel is someone who gives more than he has. In education, this unscrupulous behaviour will inevitably lead to a cultural revolution.” (Spaemann, 1978, p. 33). I agreed with this answer but supplemented it with the statement that the unscrupulous behaviour lamented by Spaemann was evident not only in cultural-revolutionary tendencies of educational reform, but also in “theses, such as those of the Bonn-Forum” (Benner, 1979a, p. 11). That is because the nine thesis had not taken on the necessary work of developing non-relativistic considerations when proclaiming trivial answers.

At the time, the dispute about which affirmations in education were to be seen as the “correct” ones, was not only the subject of debates in educational research and

policy², but was also carried out in court between 1977 and 1989 between a group of parents and the Minister of Education and Cultural Affairs of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia.³ The parents had filed a suit against a textbook for early readers that, in their view, contained cartoons which subjected members of children's parent and grandparent generation to negative judgements and ridicule (see the detailed account in Benner, 1988, pp. 141–159). In one illustration, for example, a grandmother says to a child that girls should wear skirts and not trousers and real boys should not cry. In the book, characters in the margin of the page were seen to be commenting on this interaction with statements such as “Grandma says blah, blah, blah” as if to be saying, “I’m so glad not all grandmas are like that.”

The group of parents who had filed the suit (one of whom was the head of the North Rhine-Westphalian Parents’ Association) interpreted these and other passages to imply that the state-approved textbook used in their daughter’s lessons – and the primary school lessons derived from it – called on the pupils to adopt certain value judgements and attitudes. They took legal action because in several places the textbook displayed views that did not agree with their own. In the end, it was this affirmative attitude and argumentation style of the parents who had filed the suit that led the court to reject the complaint without having to address the pedagogical quality of the textbook itself.

In their legal suit, the parents had not opposed the general affirmative tendencies at the heart of the textbook or the educational reform predating them, but rather the specific passages that did not correspond to their own values. They called on the state to ensure that only value judgements aligned with the customs recognized in the families of origin are represented in the textbook. To support their case, the parents who filed the suit collected expert reports. The authors of these reports referred explicitly to the principles of “affirmative education.” The reports demanded recognition of the parental right to their children’s education by the public school system, even in the event that the parents had erroneous or even false ideas about education and – I would add – exercised their right to education without observing children’s rights, thereby violating the requirements of a joint and public education of the next generation (see Benner, 1988, p. 147).

In my expert statement held at the oral hearing before the Higher Administrative Court for the State of North Rhine-Westphalia on 13 September 1985, I assumed the view that the textbook did indeed show a problematic understanding of education (*Erziehung* and *Bildung*) in certain passages, but that the texts did not define how they were used in class. It is possible for the texts to be used in class as materials for critical discussion. Thus, the conclusion that the selection of certain content

²Cf. the Tübingen Declaration on the Theses of the Bonn-Forum of 1978, prepared by an unspecified ad hoc group of the DGfE – German Education Research Association; cf. Herrmann (1978).

³See judgement of the Higher Administrative Court for the State of North Rhine-Westphalia in Case No 5 A 923/80, delivered on 27 September 1985 and confirmed by the Federal Administrative Court on 3 May 1988 in its judgment in BVerwG 7 C 92.86 and by the Federal Constitutional Court on 9 February 1989 in its judgment in 1 BvR 1181/88.

necessarily corresponds to certain learning objectives is not legitimate. For example, textbook sources on the Thirty Years' War or the Holocaust could not reasonably be read as having the aim to sway young people towards religious wars or raising them in the ideology of National Socialism. In all subjects, thus, teaching should be designed for learners to acquire knowledge, be supported in their ability to form judgements and be enabled to actively engage in discussion, rather than for learners to affirm imparted predetermined values.

The Higher Administrative Court conducted extensive deliberations. At the centre of its final judgement – which was challenged by the parents who had filed the suit but ultimately stood up to the review by the Federal Administrative Court and the Federal Constitutional Court – were justifications based on legal arguments and school theory. The court recognised the fact that the aforementioned textbook about “grandmas” was “perceived to be unflattering” by many citizens and probably still are today (p. 13), but also made clear that:

- Textbooks are “not the sole medium of education, but one teaching tool among others” (p. 8).
- Only when viewed together, “the textbooks and the anticipated actions of the teacher in class ... allows a judgment to be made” as to “whether the textbook supports the objectives of public education to be achieved and the limits of public education to be maintained” (p. 9).
- “In school, children hear opinions that are not expressed in their parental home,” which is “inevitable given the different approaches to education among the parents” (p. 13).
- “School activities” ... must be “open to the variety of views on educational issues to the extent that it is compatible with an orderly state school system” (p. 8).
- “School authorities” must “practice tolerance” with regard to this variety, but “refrain from any indoctrination” (p. 8).

I listed the last two points at the end of this section to bridge the gap between the affirmative theses of the Bonn-Forum and a non-affirmative approach to public education. Dieter Wehling summarized this gap brilliantly in his formulation of the principles for political education known as the “Beutelsbach Consensus.” According to Wehling, political education must neither indoctrinate nor overwhelm with ideology. What is discussed as controversial in science, or in constitutional law, as a matter of course, must also be presented as controversial in class (cf. Wehling, 1976; Grammes, 2017). My view is that this applies not only to political education, but to all areas of learning and instruction (see Benner, 2020, pp. 186 and 191; Benner et al., 2015, p. 188).

If the Minister of Education Wilhelm Hahn of Baden-Württemberg had recognized and shared the consensus formulated by Wehling in 1978, he could have problematized the criticism of emancipatory education presented at the Bonn-Forum. He could have done so without committing his teachers to an educational ideology that amounts to the view that the success of education (*Erziehung*) is dependent on learners' agreement with existing customs and conventions, and at the same time underestimates learners' ability to form their own judgements when met

with conflicting conventions. Similarly, it took many years for the general discourse in educational research to acknowledge the importance of the “Beutelsbach Consensus.” In the discussion of the nine theses of the Bonn-Forum, the Beutelsbach Consensus was not addressed, not even in the responses to the forum, which was a mistake.

Outline of a Non-affirmative Philosophy of Education: Foundational Concepts, Theories and Forms of Pedagogical Practice

Based on an examination of the intellectual history of non-affirmativity, in my General Pedagogy (*Allgemeine Pädagogik*, 1st edition 1987; 8th edition 2015), I developed an action-theoretical (*Handlungstheoretische*) understanding of pedagogical thinking and acting that:

1. Identifies education as a human practice that – alongside work, ethics, politics, art and religion – is indispensable in terms of anthropology and education theory.
2. Defines pedagogical thought and action based on two constitutive concepts historical a priori and two regulative principles historical a posteriori.
3. Distinguishes between three areas of theory, each with specific faulty forms.
4. Differentiates between professional and non-professional educational practice in distinguishable forms of a *regulating* and *disciplining* of education. These forms of educational practice expand experience and interaction through teaching. In a subsequent step, teaching then evolves to an education aimed at self-responsible action.

These basic ideas are presented with the help of illustrations from my “General Pedagogy” – without references to page numbers. Figure 2.1 lists six fields of practice – from economics, ethics, pedagogy, and politics to art and religion. It does not claim to be comprehensive, but rather aims to highlight that one of the tasks of modern public education is to prepare future generations to enter these fields of activity independently and to enable them to participate in their further development. Unlike a Aristotelian terminology and order, the proposed view of practice does not focus on ethics and politics (and is distinguished from work (*poiesis*) and art, as well as philosophy). It has its roots in Karl Marx’ revaluation of *work as human practice*. I acknowledged Marx’ critique of Hegel in my dissertation, without sharing his devaluation of religion (see Benner, 1966, pp. 137–162).

New about this ordering of the practices is that it aligns the task of educating future generations with the task of introducing all people to the six fields of action. It also acknowledges a historical necessity for each of the six practices. As far as we know, people have always been confronted with these six practices in some way. The differences that Aristotle made – among other things – between theory, practice, and work are not being negated by this ordering, but rather interpreted

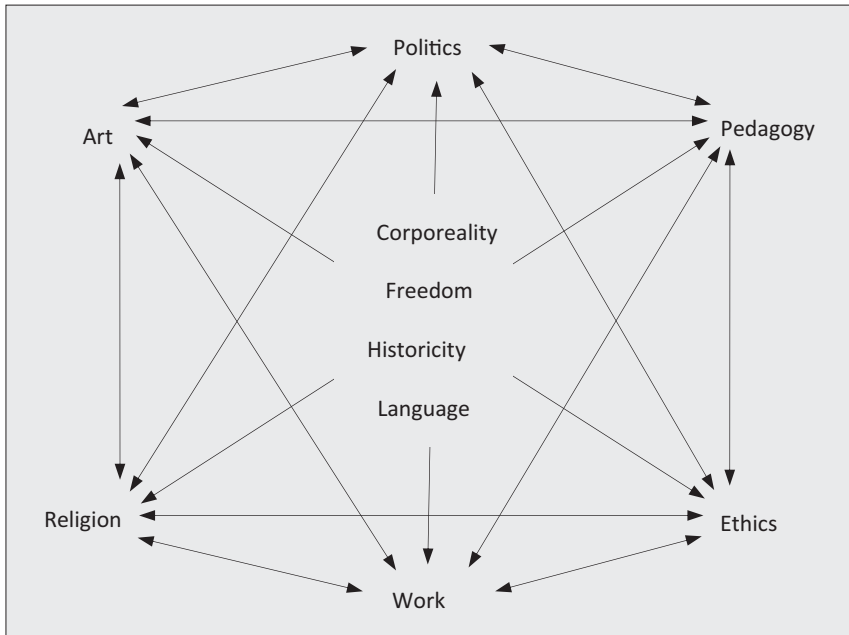


Fig. 2.1 Diagram of a non-hierarchical order of fundamental areas of human practice. (According to Benner, 2015, p. 46)

non-hierarchically in their intrinsic logic. This avoids traditional demarcations between work as lower and art and philosophy as higher transformation (*Bildung*).⁴

My *Allgemeine Pädagogik* (Benner, 2015) attempts to determine the logical relationships between the six practices, by means of the existential elements of corporeality, freedom, historicity and linguisticity. These existential elements transcend the six practices. I adopted the idea to view practices in a non-hierarchical order from the philosopher and pedagogue Eugen Fink, whom I met during my philosophical studies in Vienna and whose chair at the University of Freiburg I held for three semesters after my habilitation. Fink described the order of co-existential and existential elements phenomenologically and cosmologically. He differentiated along the basic anthropological phenomena of work, love, domination, death, and play (see Fink, 1979). I owe to him not only important impulses, but also fundamental insights into the basic phenomena and the practice-transcending significance of the existential elements. However, I do not interpret them anthropologically and cosmologically, but primarily in terms of education and action theory (*Handlungstheorie*). I developed the notion of the corporeality of human practice

⁴For the origin of the term “non-hierarchical” see Gruber (1979); for the education theory meaning of non-hierarchical structure, see Humboldt’s reference in his treatise on the limits of the effectiveness of the state from 1792, p. 78, that every activity can give a person a worthy form, provided that it is carried out only freely, actively and in a variety of ways.

based on Fichte's concept of corporeality (see Fichte, 1796, § 6) and interpreted the body as a receptive and articulatory organ of human practice. Furthermore, I distinguished the freedom of practice from both arbitrariness and mere freedom of choice, understanding historicity beyond the view of human beings as either victims or master of history. I positioned thinking of language beyond image-theoretical and conventionalist or constructivist language models. I sought to describe an inherent logic for pedagogical practice that does not identify pedagogical activity as a mere means to the end of other social activities and practices, but rather as a constituent form of practice that purposefully brings about its own end by enabling young people to enter the six areas of human practice independently and to act according to their own judgement.

On this conceptual and theoretical basis, I developed a structure of basic concepts for pedagogical practice that distinguishes between the individual and social dimension of pedagogical interaction. It develops basic educational concepts in relation to how they connect to corporeality, freedom, historicity and linguisticity of human beings and arranges them in such a way that three basic theoretical areas of pedagogy can be distinguished and put into relation to each other. In the systematic delineation of the four basic concepts, I drew from Kant's distinction between constitutive and regulative principles, without, however, following his distinction between transcendental intuitions and scientific categories or regulative ideas of reason. Instead, I differentiated between constitutive and regulative principles of pedagogical thinking, judgement, and activity. The constitutive principles inform basic concepts of the individual dimension of pedagogical practice, and the regulative principles those of the social dimension. Together, these principles develop relevant problem-historical and action-theoretical (*handlungstheoretisch*) relationships between principles and basic concepts that are significant for educational practice, theory and research (see Brüggem, 2006).

Two basic concepts are developed. The concept of the *Bildsamkeit* of every human being, which is not determined by natural abilities or talents (*Bildsamkeit*), and the concept of a physical, free, historical and linguistic summoning to self-activity (*Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit*). Together, they determine the individual dimension of pedagogical interaction. Their modern formulation was developed successfully during the modern enlightenment. Since then, their significance as a historical *a priori* has been acknowledged in action theory (*Handlungstheorie*), allowing them to claim validity also for the pre-enlightenment. Reflections of their significance can be traced back to ancient myths. People have always been born with an indeterminate plasticity, as was the case in the ancient *polis*, which for ideological reasons distinguished between free and slave by nature, without being able to refer to a plasticity established by nature.

The two constitutive principles concerning the individual dimension of pedagogical interaction allow us to be critical about concepts of education, pedagogical theories and research concepts that speak, for example, of an education based on aptitude, or such that claim that 75% of the developmental potential of humans are determined by aptitude, 24% by the environment and only 1% determined by interaction. Such findings, presented by psychological research in

the twentieth century, are wrong not only because their data was forged or their results could not be replicated, but also because their hypotheses were based on categorical errors, which become apparent when one considers that biological, sociological and interactive causalities can never add up to 100%. Fixed natural dispositions or talents developed through socialisation are inadequate as basic concepts of pedagogical thinking and argumentation if *Bildsamkeit* of individuals in physical, free, historical, and linguistic interactions is acknowledged. Both basic concepts are interactive rather than ontological attributions made about learners or educators. They make visible the individual and social dimension of pedagogical interaction, rather than claiming to be ultimate justifications for human dignity. They are, however, helpful in revealing ideological dimensions of pedagogy, such as those underlying concepts of aptitude equity, talent equity, or equal opportunities (see Bellmann & Merkens, 2019).

For the two *constitutive* concepts of the individual dimension of pedagogical practice to be recognized, certain societal measures are necessary. These measures are explicated by the two *regulative* concepts of the social dimension of pedagogical thought and action. These regulative concepts do not have a historical *a priori* but a historical *a posteriori* status. Historically, they were developed only after the establishment of the modern concept of *Bildsamkeit* and that of summoning to self-activity (*Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit*) (see on this point Brügggen, 2022). These regulative concepts are bound to the conditions of modern societies and are therefore not valid for understanding education in pre-modern societies.

The constitutive concept concerning the individual, the one of indeterminate plasticity, or *Bildsamkeit*, corresponds to the regulative principle of non-hierarchical relations between education, economics, ethics, politics, art, and religion (position 4, Fig. 2.2). Under modern conditions, educational goals can no longer solely be derived from ethics, politics or economics. Therein, modern societies differ from,

	<i>Constitutive basic concepts of the individual dimension</i>	<i>Regulative basic concepts of the social dimension</i>
A <i>Theories of education (Erziehung)</i>	(2) Summoning to self-activity (<i>Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit</i>)	(3) Pedagogical transformation of societal influences and requirements
B <i>Theories of Bildung</i>	(1) <i>Bildsamkeit</i> as humans being destined to receptive and spontaneous corporeity, freedom, historicity and linguisticity	(4) Non-hierarchical order of cultural and societal practices
C <i>Theories of educational institutions and institutional reform</i>		

Fig. 2.2 Four basic concepts of pedagogical thinking and acting with associated theories of education and Bildung (*Erziehungs- und Bildungstheorien*) and theories of educational institutions and their reform. (Benner, 2015, p. 130)

for example, the Ancien Régime, where education was based on the assumptions that (1) professions and class are inherited from parents to their children, (2) that the morals of the younger generation should correspond to those of the adult generation, and (3) that the political and religious orientation of the parents determines that of the children. What was deemed legitimate in pre-modern social formations, such as the position of the *pater familias* and the authority of the older generation maintained from birth until the death of the parents, can no longer claim absolute validity in modern societies. In modern societies, the task of handing down traditions across generations is no longer to be fulfilled by the means of demonstration and imitation. Instead, the younger generation must be introduced to the tasks of actively and reflectively developing economics, ethics, politics, art, and religion. In this function, pedagogical action is no longer subordinate to ethics and politics. Instead, educational processes are viewed in a non-hierarchical relationship to the other forms of practice. Moral education (*moralische Erziehung*) is no longer possible without a *reflective* moral formation (*moralische Bildung*); political education (*politische Erziehung*) is no longer possible without *reflective* political formation (*politische Bildung*); religious education (*religiöse Erziehung*) is no longer possible without *reflective* religious formation (*religiöse Bildung*). The goals of education must be to enable younger generations to participate independently in the deliberations on what is to be preserved and what is to be changed in society. This civic orientation distinguishes modern education from pre-modern subordination of pedagogy to economic, moral, political, and religious aspects.

Next, the second basic concept of education, that is, the concept of education as a summoning to free self-activity (*Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit*, Position 2 in Fig. 2.2) must be connected to the social dimension of educational processes. The non-hierarchical order of societal forms of practice corresponds, which is the fourth principle, is connected with the third principle: the need to transform interests vested in education by society into pedagogical categories. Everything that children are expected to learn in educational settings must be pedagogically prepared for learners to enable them to learn it in ways that simultaneously expands experience, supports their capacity to form judgements and opinions, is reflective and participatory.

This has consequences not only for the forms of pedagogical action, but also for theory. In Fig. 2.2, the four basic principles are ordered in a way that makes apparent their fundamental role for the following three theories of pedagogical activity:

- For theories of formation (*Bildung*) that base the task of human growth on the concept of *Bildsamkeit* and the non-hierarchical relationship between pedagogical practice and other forms of practice
- For theories of education (*Erziehung*) that understand educative influences as the promotion of self-reflection, self-judgement and self-action and link them to pedagogical transformations of external demands on education
- For theories of educational institutions that define the educational environments as transitory places with specific transitions, from forms of action in contexts of formal education to contexts of non-formal education

It is not a legitimate task of general pedagogy (*Allgemeine Pädagogik*) as an academic discipline to clarify and to normatively articulate specific methods, patterns or forms of pedagogical practice, based on the developed basic concepts, foundational theories and forms of action in pedagogical practice. Theories of pedagogical practice themselves must be developed in the debate with historical and current discourses. However, the basic concepts inherit the function of critically evaluating theories of education (*Erziehung*), *Bildung*, and educational institutions. Figure 2.3 lists some well-known theories that, when evaluated with the above presented basic concepts, show flaws and inconsistencies. These theories must be changed or redeveloped to ensure they do not fail to describe their object based on categorical reasons alone.

Based on the basic concepts developed above, a critique is possible of the intentional and functional theories of education, formal and material theories of *Bildung*, and theories that decouple or connect the individual and social dimension of education. My critique does not aim to prohibit the development of such theories in psychology, sociology, and education economics. Rather, the critique aims to show that these theories only become relevant for pedagogical theories of action and educational research, if they orient their questions on the basic concepts of pedagogical thought and action, and the pedagogical theories of action based on them.

In the field of educational theories (A) in Germany, Wolfgang Brezinka (1971) and Niklas Luhmann (1986) developed intentional (A1) and functional (A2) approaches based on the basic concepts of *summoning to self-activity* (*Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit*) (Fig. 2.2, basic concept 1) and pedagogical transformation of *societal influences and requirements* (Fig. 2.2, basic concept 3). In cases where they were interpreted as theories of pedagogical of action, they led to distortions of pedagogical practice and oversimplified concepts in educational science.

In his metatheory of education, Brezinka defined education as an intentional teleological-causal-technological form of practice. He wrote that education

	Individual aspect:	Social aspect:
A Theory of education (<i>Erziehungstheorie</i>)	A1 Theories of intentional education (viewing teaching and education as means for reaching given ends)	A2 Theories of functional education (focusing societal reproduction and the economy)
B Theory of formation (<i>Bildungstheorie</i>)	B1 Theories of formal <i>Bildung</i> , (focused on developing learner's abilities)	B2 Theories of material <i>Bildung</i> (focused on the transmission of subject matter)
C Theory of educational insitutions	C1 Theories that decouple the individual from the social dimension	C2 Theories that connect the individual to the social dimension

Fig. 2.3 Faulty forms of pedagogical theories of action. (Benner, 2015, p. 134)

(*Erziehung*) are “actions by which adults (“educators,” “teachers”) try to intervene in the process of becoming and growing personalities, in order to support or initiate learning processes that lead to dispositions and behaviors that are viewed by adults as desirable” (Brezinka, 1971, p. 26.f.). This rather traditional definition of education (*Erziehung*) is problematic because Brezinka interprets education as a conglomerate of normative and technological aspects, of which he says that educational activities and institutions existed only because one expects them to be “suitable means to achieve certain ... desired or valued states of the personalities to be educated” (ibid., p. 31). Regarding the normative side of this concept of the pedagogical relationship, with a view to the ethos of educational actors, he said that only those who had the technical means of educational influence and legitimate educational authority would be able to cope with today’s increasing uncertainty of societal values regarding religious beliefs (Brezinka, 1988, p. 99ff.).

Functional theories of education (*funktionale Erziehungstheorie*, A2) replace the intentional concept of education with one that derives the task of education from the function education is expected to have in society. Functional theory develops its effectiveness largely independently of the intentions and means in the hands of educational actors. Niklas Luhmann recently tried to justify such a concept of education in the German-speaking area. In his study “Coding and Programming,” he interpreted the general system-theoretical distinction between standardization and code in such a way that he assigned the task of standardization within education to the requirements of the other social subsystems and defined the specific code of educational action by the fact that it differentiates worse from better learning performance. Addressing educators and teachers, he stated that anyone who tries to influence and change adolescents according to normative ideas about upbringing will necessarily fail in their efforts. In contrast, those who orient their pedagogical action on the distinction between better and worse pupils can have a pedagogically successful effect and do this in every act of pedagogical assessment (cf. Luhmann, 1986).

Intentional theories of education (*intentionale Erziehungstheorien*, A1) like Brezinka’s violate the principle of *summoning self-activity* (*Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit*). They see children and adolescents not as co-actors in pedagogical interactions, but as objects that, according to preconceived normative ideas about upbringing, are to be influenced in such a way that their thinking, judging and acting correspond to an external ideal. Functional theories of education (*funktionale Erziehungstheorien*, A2), on the other hand, deduct from the principle of the necessary *transformation of social influences and tasks*. These intentional and functional theories of education cannot be expected to provide explanations and interpretations of educational interactions that are legitimate in an action-theoretical sense (*handlungstheoretisch*). The theories listed in Fig. 2.3 under A1 and A2 are not sufficiently complex and lack the intrinsic logic of educational processes (*Erziehung and Bildung*). They do not possess the quality of guiding and orienting action in education.

In the field of theories of formation (*Bildungstheorien*, B), analogous reductions of problems can be observed in connection with the principles of *Bildsamkeit*

(Fig. 2.2, basic concept 1) and *non-hierarchical order of human practices* (Fig. 2.2, basic concept 4). The formal and material educational theories listed in Fig. 2.3 under B1 and B2 undercut the intrinsic complexity of pedagogical interactions by reducing the task of pedagogical practice to formal training of abilities or the (material) development of particular skills. Both fail to develop a concept of the individual and social competencies which education is supposed to foster. They are not sufficiently complex and, as Elmar Anhalt (2012) and Thomas Rucker (2014) have shown in extensive basic theoretical studies, do not do justice to the basic structure of education and the interplays (*Wechselwirkungen*) that constitute educational processes (*Erziehungs- und Bildungsprozesse*).

The same applies to the theories of educational institutions listed in Fig. 2.3 under C1 and C2. They ignore important connections between the basic concepts concerning the individual and social dimension of education and do not understand educational institutions as transitory institutions concerned with the transition from family education (and socialization) into differentiated social fields of action and subsystems. Some strands of the German Reformpädagogik (*German Progressive Education*) decouple the individual and societal dimension of educational action, locating pedagogical practice in isolated spaces “outside” of society. They claim priority of pedagogical practice over all other fields of action. This is justified with the argument that it is important to make the world around children and young people suitable to them. System-theoretical functionalizations, on the other hand, tend to link the education system to the other social subsystems that constitute its environment. Thereby, they disregard the basic concepts of *summoning to free self-activity* (Fig. 2.2, basic concept 2) and *pedagogical transformation of external societal interests into legitimate pedagogical action* (Fig. 2.2, basic concept 3). Neither approach develops a concept of the task of educational institutions – beginning with the family, kindergarten and schools, and extending to vocational training and socio-pedagogical institutions – to secure both transitions from one educational institution to the next and those from institutionalized education processes (*Erziehungs- and Bildungsprozessen*) to independent participation and involvement of young people in social life.

In the context of this discussion, it is worthwhile to consider the substantial changes that Niklas Luhmann made in the posthumously published works to his own sociological concept of the education system. In the writings published during his lifetime, he had envisaged a strict separation of code and program for the education system and defined the code of the education system by distinguishing between “better” and “worse” pupils (cf. Luhmann, 1986). Four years after his death, his treatise *Das Erziehungssystem der Gesellschaft* (The Education System of Society; edited by Dieter Lenzen) was published. Here he distanced himself from his system-theoretical parody of reform pedagogical illusions and stated that the general system-functional separation of code and program could not be applied to the education system. He also argued that the code “better-worse” was not suitable for describing performance in the education system. At best, this code functions as an auxiliary code in the service of a completely different code that does not distinguish between better and worse student performance, but between “communicable/not

communicable” performance (Luhmann, 2002, pp. 42–46, 64, 73–74). It was only after this correction that Luhmann’s system theory really found application to the educational science and pedagogy. However, the distinction between communicability/non-communicability is not new, but has been made in the context of various theoretical traditions. These can be differentiated again according to the various forms of pedagogical action that will be discussed in the next section (on a fundamental criticism and appreciation of Luhmann, see Benner, 1979b, 2003a).

The four basic concepts introduced above also have a *critical* function, not least with regards to the modes of operation, tasks, and institutional positioning of three forms of pedagogical action. These forms of pedagogical action will only be briefly presented here, with a final figure from my *General Pedagogy*, developed there in more detail. Figure 2.4 shows continuities and discontinuities in the differentiation and determination of three classical forms of pedagogical action from antiquity to the present.

Modern versions of the three forms of pedagogical action were developed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762) in his treatise “Emile or On Education,” Immanuel Kant (1803) in his “Lectures on Pedagogy,” Johann Friedrich Herbart (1806) in his

	<i>Aristotle</i>	<i>Kant</i>	<i>Herbart</i>
<i>Regulating education and Bildung</i>	Punishment	Disciplining	Harm-preventing and protective rather than punitive education
<i>Instructional education and Bildung.</i> Teaching based on didactic knowledge or a pedagogical treatment of contents supporting students studying and learning reaching conceptual knowledge and beyond.	Instruction in all the basic skills that cannot be passed down without schools	Cultivating	Teaching as an expanding of experience and handling (Umgang)
<i>Advisory (guiding) education and Bildung.</i> Supporting the development of reflected will regarding open questions and growth as a person.	Obedience	Civilizing	Guidance (Zucht) as education leading to self-responsible action
<i>Morality & Virtue & Competence</i>	Not a result of education, but the result of a virtuous lifestyle	Moralizing through the conscience formed by judging and acting	Judging and acting as a principle of character building

Fig. 2.4 Three basic forms of pedagogical action and their delimitation from the morality and virtue of adults emerging only after education. (From Benner, 2015, pp. 216–327)

“General Pedagogy” and Friedrich Schleiermacher (1820/21, 1826) in his “Lectures on Education.” Rousseau rejected punishment – but also praise – as an educational tool and argued for education that relies on rationally regulated freedom. Kant and Herbart assigned disciplining pedagogical action the task of protecting children and society from harm by preventing young people from acting unreasonably. Not, however, to guide them positively by regulatory measures. Rousseau, Kant and Herbart extended the task of school education beyond the introduction to elementary techniques (e.g. reading, writing, counting), already mentioned by Aristotle, to include the communication of the basic principles of modern science. They defined school education as the content-based cultivation of thought and judgement, which does not occur in everyday life, but must take place artificially in a formal education setting. In addition to school teaching, they conceptualized a common civilizing social education (*zivilisatorische Sozialerziehung*) with the task to introduce the young generation to the rules of living together and to support the transition, while still in childhood and youth, from pedagogical institutions to those beyond formal education, where they participate in social life with their own sense and their own will.

Modern education differs from the education conceived by Aristotle in that obedience could no longer be forced by threat and punishment, but should instead develop early on as obedience to one’s own insights. According to Herbart and Schleiermacher, supportive education should be designed both in the context of instructive school education and a socio-pedagogical and advisory education outside of school. Instructive education intends to broaden experience and contact with science, art, society and interreligiosity under modern conditions; advisory education intends to encourage children and young people to learn to confer with themselves and others. Beyond the differences mentioned above, Aristotle and modern theorists agree that the character of young people developing under the influence of education should not be the direct result of educational intervention but the result of their own thinking and acting. This can be interpreted as a further indication of the basic features of non-affirmative pedagogical action, which will be summarized once again under the three action theory questions.

From the perspective of educational theory (*Erziehungstheorie*), the non-affirmative nature of educational practice means that young people actively participate in their education and are never merely educated from the outside, or “brought up.” From the perspective of a theory of *Bildung* (*Bildungstheorie*), pedagogical processes are oriented towards the interplay between young people and world, in which they acquire what is alien and unknown to them. From the perspective of institutional theory, pedagogical practice takes place not only “naturally,” while living together, but increasingly also in designated places where things can be taught that cannot be learned through everyday experience. Such things are writing and foreign languages, science and history and everything that is in danger of being lost through interrupted traditions in the field of morality and religion, but which is indispensable for the survival of modern societies. Non-affirmative communication in this sense takes place by the means of regulating and disciplining. These educational forms of counteracting prevent young people from behaving in an unreasonable manner without positively directing their behaviour in

relation to norms. Reflective processes in the context of educational instruction do not typically occur in everyday life but in ways that artificially expands experience theoretically and aesthetically. In the area of advisory education, transitions occur between and amongst educational institutions and the entry of young people into societal activities and subsystems, in which the generations interact with each other without the need for further pedagogical support.

On the Further Development of the Concept of Pedagogical Non-affirmativity and the Development of Basic Pedagogical Differentiations

The research presented in the first two sections of this chapter pursued action-theoretical questions. After completing my General Pedagogy, I continued to elaborate them by tracing them back to ancient myths and linking them from the very beginning to the reinterpretation of findings in the social sciences.

In-Depth Studies of the History of the Problem

The in-depth problem historical studies presented above served not only the purpose of securing the foundational pedagogical concepts, but also to pave the way for a discussion of regional and international research projects. These projects were developed in collaboration with research groups that worked on topics such as “Bildung und Kritik” (Benner et al., 1999), “Kritik in der Pädagogik” (Benner et al., 2003), “Erziehung, Bildung, Negativität” (Benner, 2005a, b) and “Erziehung – Moral – Demokratie” (Benner et al., 2015). The intention behind my own contributions in these volumes was not to develop theory, but rather to expand questions and research approaches, among other things, to create opportunity for reflections on action theory (Handlungstheorie).

Two of these studies will be examined below. Both refer to the foundational notions of pedagogical thinking and acting – the concept of *Bildsamkeit* and the concept of the necessary educative support of processes of formation (*Bildungsprozessen*).

The Ten Commandments of the Jewish Philosopher Moses – which can be traced back to the negative confessions of faith in the graves of the ancient Egyptian pharaohs – can be interpreted as early indications of the non-affirmative nature of the concept of *Bildsamkeit*. Unlike the positive Jewish code of conduct, they do not define what is good, but only specify what is to be avoided as evil (see Benner et al., 2015, pp. 16–22). Their negative concept of good related to the myth was handed down in the “Theogony” of Hesiod, of the Greek gods Epimetheus, Prometheus and Zeus endowing the first human beings and the philosophical interpretation of this

myth in Plato's dialogue "Protagoras" (see *ibid.*, pp. 22–31). According to these, due to their epimethic nature, human beings were initially not endowed, namely, "a-kósmetos" meaning they were not well integrated into the order of the cosmos, an idea that Schleiermacher tried to capture for his contemporaries in his Plato translation by the German word "unbegabt" (untalented or not gifted) (Plato, Protagoras 321 c 1–2). Humans became capable of surviving only when Prometheus stole fire from a forge of the god Hephaistos and thus gave them the ability to invent technology. However, because they used technology to wage war and kill each other, Zeus additionally endowed humans with "sense of justice" and "shame" (*dike* and *aisthos*), giving them the ability to develop law and morality. Both the Jewish and Greek myths speak, each in its own way, of the fact that man has no inherent knowledge of what is good, but has always possessed an ability to develop technology, morality, and justice. This ability Rousseau later described in his book "Emile" as undecided or open "perfectibility" or the ability to develop abilities. Based on this, Herbart, Fichte, Humboldt, Schleiermacher and others avoided later misinterpretations of humans as deficient beings, by reinterpreting the unfinished or formable (*bildsam*) nature of humans. The understanding of *Bildsamkeit* developed by these thinkers, and Humboldt in particular, does not only refer to the individual human being or the human species, but also to the human relationship with the world (see Benner & Brüggem, 2004). Humans do not only have the ability or capacity to learn (plasticity), but they are always also world-forming (*weltbildend*) in their interplay with the world (these connections were overlooked in Klaus Heinrich's 1975 lecture on "Enlightenment in the Religions").

Regardless of the differences between ancient and modern philosophy, similar problem-historical connections exist between Plato's concept of *paideia* and the modern concepts of education in Rousseau, Fichte, Herbart and Schleiermacher. They all point out that an appropriate concept of education identifies humans not only as learning and educable individuals, but, at the same time as beings who develop morality and justice – and also science, technology, art, and religion (see Thimm, 2007 on education and morality). Plato traces the implied connection to an early concept of *paideia*, which is primarily geared towards adults, in the Allegory of the Cave in the 7th book of his treatise on the state (*Politeia* 514 a–521 b). *Paideia* refers to a double "art of redirecting" the viewpoint (*Bildung*, *ibid.*, 518 d), namely, first the art of being able to change one's own view, and then the art of being able to encourage and summon others to change their views (*Erziehung*).

The example Plato uses to illustrate this is that no one can use what they have seen themselves in order to change another's view. This means that everyone must change their view themselves, by seeing. But that is only possible if they live in a community where others turn their gaze and reciprocally share their experiences with one another. In Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," this practice of turning the gaze occurs not only among the philosophers, on whose education (*Erziehung and Bildung*) Plato focused his attention. Turning the gaze had already occurred among the simple cave dwellers, who, tied to certain places in a cave, perceive changing phenomena on a cave wall, talk to each other about their perceptions and make bets on what will appear next. However, they are not able to understand the prisoner

whose shackles had been removed and who made new experiences with himself and the world. They cannot turn their gaze the way he did, nor do they feel called upon by him to change their gaze.

What Socrates fails to achieve in the “Allegory of the Cave,” he succeeds in Plato’s dialogue “Menon.” Here, he provokes a boy to change his view, which finally leads him to understand the Pythagorean theorem.⁵ The metaphor that nobody can put anything “into a person’s eye,” that they have not seen for themselves, appears in modernity with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who extends it from the sense of sight to all senses and ultimately to the formation of the sense of community in childhood and adolescence. He uses precise observations to show how each sense is formed individually and how different senses interact with each other in ways that may inhibit and/or promote insight and understanding. What Plato said about the sense of sight – that it is impossible to put something that one has seen into the mind of another – Rousseau applied to all the senses. The equivalent of “turning the gaze” must be performed with seeing, touching, hearing, smelling, and tasting, and then, after being performed with each sense, also between the senses (Rousseau, 1762, pp. 154–183).

Rousseau’s observations are guided by the general educational principles of the “éducation de la nature,” the “éducation des choses” and the “éducation de l’homme,” which he established in the first book of *Emile* (ibid, pp. 10–11). He used these distinctions as a basis for the educational processes of all ages from early childhood, childhood, and adolescence to the beginning of adulthood (for early childhood and childhood, see Piper, 2018, pp. 27–49). In the same way that Rousseau describes the development of the senses by incorporating the findings of modern optics, acoustics, etc. – while preserving Plato’s insight developed with regard to the sense of sight – he also bases his principles of education on the experiences of modernity. Yet, Rousseau still adheres to Plato’s teaching of *paideia* as a twofold art of the changing the viewpoint. The connections between the three types or basic concepts of education – (1) “education through nature” or the capacity to learn (*Bildsamkeit*), (2) “education through things” or the *Bildung* interplay of the young person with the world, and (3) “education through people” as educational support of *Bildung* processes – lead Rousseau to the concept “éducation négative” (negative education). This concept applies not only to childhood, but to all ages and even to the learning and educational processes of adults (cf. Blankertz, 1990). By “negative education” Rousseau describes pedagogical activity that recognises that learning can merely be supported, but never be caused and directed intentionally. Following Rousseau, education (*Erziehung*) takes influence by actuating the individual’s activity in learning (*Bildsamkeit*) and fostering experiences with things, rather than with the creation of such experiences. The third type of education cannot replace the first or second. It presupposes the plasticity (*bildsame Natur*) of individuals to be educated as well as their ability to enter into transformational interplay with the world.

⁵On the connections between Plato’s *Politeia* and the Protagoras dialogue, which are only hinted at here, see Benner et al., 2015, pp. 22–39; on the correlations with the *Menon* dialogue, see Benner, 2020, pp. 15–20.

But the second and third types of education that Rousseau distinguished cannot do without the first either.

Rousseau tied his concept of education to the indeterminate perfectibility of human nature (*Bildsamkeit*) and processes of *Bildung* occurring in interplay with the world and things – not only as negative education, but also as positive education. “Education through humans” Rousseau referred to as “making use of the development (of our abilities) that we are taught” (Rousseau, 1762, p. 11). He added that the third type of education must be oriented to the “other two” (*ibid.*). Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1796, p. 43. Corrolaria to § 3) attempted to define the relation between *Bildsamkeit*, *Bildung* and education (*Erziehung*) more precisely with his concept of education developed in the treatise on the “Foundations of Natural Right.” Fichte said, “Summons to free self-activity is what is called education.” He did not understand this to be a pedagogical act, which, according to some interpreters, seeks to have an effect on young people through empty subject-theoretical impulses such as to “be self-active,” but rather he saw it as a kind of summoning that supports changing the gaze from old to new, and from new to old experiences. How superficial the subject-critical deconstructions of Fichte’s concept of education (*Erziehungsbegriff*) are (see Ricken, 1999, pp. 374–388) becomes apparent when confronted with the task that Fichte proposed in his “Speeches to the German Nation.” In the second book titled “Speeches,” he exemplifies the act of education by suggesting to give learners any number of slats and summoning them to find out the minimum number of slats necessary to enclose an area (Fichte, 1808, Second Speech, pp. 399–400; cf. Benner, 2020, pp. 26–28).

With his concept of education as summoning to self-activity (aimed at changing of the learners gaze), Fichte transformed Plato’s *aporia* that no one can simply implant something to be learned into another individual. In my *General Pedagogy* (Benner, 1987, pp. 63–73; 2015, pp. 82–96), I attempted to grasp these changes of view (*Blickwendungen*), with reference to Fichte, as an interplay between the subject’s self- and world-activity. Thereby, we may distinguish non-affirmative pedagogical activity from an understanding of education as the exertion of direct influence on learning and educational processes of young people (for the non-affirmative meaning of this concept for didactic actions, see Rucker, 2019).

The connections that can be pointed out between Plato’s concept of *paideia* – not yet oriented towards the education of children and young people – Rousseau’s concept of negative education, and Fichte’s concept of education as “summoning to self-activity,” refer on the one hand to antiquity and on the other to modern forms of knowledge. However, these different historical positions cannot only be interpreted in terms of the specific views of knowledge they represent. They also show resemblance in the intrinsic logical structure of educational processes (*Erziehungs- und Bildungsprozessen*).

On Basic Pedagogical Distinctions and Their Possible Meaning for a Supra-paradigmatic Description of Educational Processes (Erziehungs- und Bildungsprozessen)

I adhere to the foundational ideas developed in my *Allgemeine Pädagogik*, which has been adopted widely. However, since its publication, my thinking has developed further. In particular, I have increasingly moved towards attempts to combine foundational pedagogical theory with basic research. Significant experiences of the past few years in non-German-speaking countries – Denmark, Poland, and the Czech Republic – have contributed to this, amongst other things; in particular my experiences in China, where I taught and conducted research at ECNU (East China Normal University) for 20 years. Abroad, I was confronted with the problem of explaining basic pedagogical concepts that were developed based on German traditions, without assuming that the German tradition was widely known. This has led to fundamental distinctions that I first developed systematically in *Umriss einer allgemeinen Wissenschaftsdidaktik* (Outline of General Science Didactics). Later, I drew from these distinctions to describe research projects in which empirical and quantitative educational research is combined with research on teaching and where educational theory is combined with empirical educational research (see Benner, 2020, in particular pp. 43–65). These distinctions, which I will elaborate on in the following, allowed me to relate non-affirmative problems in pedagogical action theory to different paradigms of educational research without necessarily using the term “non-affirmative” (cf. Benner, 2022). If the three pedagogical forms of action are added to the pedagogical distinctions developed in the outline, there are a total of six, which are outlined only briefly below (Fig. 2.5).

Pedagogical situations and problems that refer to these distinctions can be interpreted in the context of a theory of pedagogical activity (*pädagogische*

- (1) Differentiation and connection between education (*Erziehung*) and *Bildung*
- (2) Differentiation and connection between teaching and learning
- (3) Differentiation and connection between positive and negative experiences
- (4) Differentiation and connection of education (*Erziehung*), *Bildung*, and competence
- (5) Differentiation and connection between educational, *Bildung*-related and methodological causalities
- (6) Differentiation and connection between regulating and disciplining education, education that aims to expanding experience and interplay by teaching, and advisory education aiming at transitions to self-responsible actions

Fig. 2.5 Basic differentiations of general education

Handlungstheorie) and examined in educational research projects using different methodologies. For example, they can be explained in scientific terms, hermeneutically decoded, analysed phenomenologically and questioned with regard to their inherent ideological blindness.

The first of the six distinctions above – that between education (*Erziehung*) and *Bildung* – refers to connections between educative guidance from pedagogical actors and the educational interplays taking place, not between these actors and young people, but between young people and their experiences of the world (cf. Benner, 2015c). This can be demonstrated in a transformation of what is called the pedagogical or didactical triangle, which Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarzik and I developed during our time as assistants at the Bonn Institute of Pedagogy (Fig. 2.6).

In learning and teaching process in school, the distinction between education (*Erziehung*) and *Bildung* corresponds to that between teaching and learning. Teaching is carried out by teachers who do not directly bring about learning but give didactical support to promote learning processes that learners go through in dealing with tasks and subject matters (Uljens, 1997).

The differences and relationships between education (*Erziehung*) and *Bildung* as well as teaching and learning become clearer if we use the third distinction between *positive and negative experiences* that pedagogical actors create for young people to undergo and experience. These negative experiences – the way they are intended and the way they are experienced – are not the same. Negative experiences on the part of pedagogical actors arise when they notice that their educative support does not have the desired effect. Negative experiences on the part of the students occur when they are confronted with the irritation of unexpectedly not understanding something. Such negative experiences may rise through the questions of a teacher, which cause confusion and irritation for the students, resulting in that the world appears in a new light, requiring them to deal with the world in a new way.

These distinctions and relationships are important for the fourth distinction (see above) in which new *competences* arise as a third component. They arise as related to positive and negative experiences from the relationships between education (*Erziehung*) and *Bildung*, as well as between teaching and learning. These competences arise from the completion of certain process of education (*Erziehung*) and

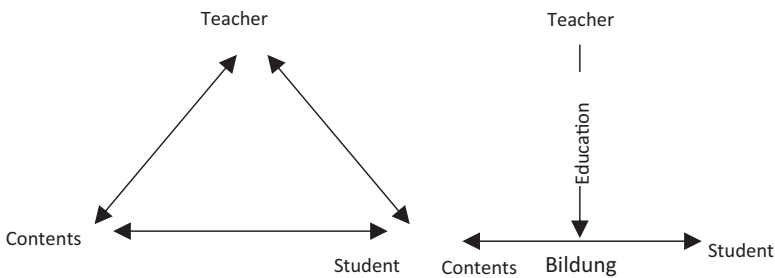


Fig. 2.6 Diagram to differentiate between education and transformation processes (*Erziehungs- und Bildungsprozesse*)

Bildung (and teaching and learning) that enable students to do something that they could not do before.

The triad of education (*Erziehung*), *Bildung*, and competence makes it possible to distinguish three so-called elementary pedagogical causalities in educational processes: an *educative* causality, a *Bildsamkeit*-related causality and a *methodological* causality. Of these, the first causality arises from the influence of a pedagogical actor, the second arises from the learners' confrontation with selected teaching materials, and the third arises from the interplay between the educating and the *Bildsamkeit*-related causality. All three together may have the effect that further learning, or relearning, is no longer dependent on educative support and that pedagogically supported learning processes transform into learning processes occurring beyond education (cf. Benner, 2018b).

The interplay of the three causalities does not mean that gender, milieu, and cultural causalities – including the forms of capital distinguished by Bourdieu (1986) – do not exist. However, instead of conceptualising pedagogical action based on a denial or recognition of such causalities, it is important to attempt to alter their influence with the help of the three pedagogical causalities identified above. Bourdieu's sociological praxeology and pedagogical-educational praxeology as well as his research on practice would then no longer ignore each other (cf. Liebau, 2009, p. 41), but could enter into fruitful connections (see section “[The importance of the basic concepts for the conceptualization of educational research projects](#)”). The legitimacy of the governing and disciplining form of action would then also depend in their sociological descriptions on the fact that it seeks to secure transitions from external discipline to self-discipline. The same would apply to the interplay of the three causalities in teaching and advisory pedagogical interactions, the success of which would depend on the transition from external instruction to self-instruction as well as external counselling into self-counselling. A description and assessment of these transitions is missing in Didier Eribon's novel *Return to Reims* (2016). The author describes his own education exclusively in Bourdieu's categories and, for a long time – perhaps for this reason – fails to fully understand his father's relationship to him and interprets his own upbringing only within the limits of Bourdieu's theory (Fig. 2.7).

- (1) Regulating-disciplining education aims at transitions from external discipline to self-discipline
- (2) Experience-expanding instruction aims at transitions from external instruction to self-instruction
- (3) Advisory education aims at achieving transitions from pedagogically supported consulting processes to self-consultation and consulting with others beyond education

Fig. 2.7 On three causalities in education and transformation processes (*Erziehungs- und Bildungsprozesse*) and their significance for the three classical pedagogical forms of action

The Importance of the Basic Concepts for the Conceptualization of Educational Research Projects

The basic principles discussed above do not only claim to play a role in conceptually constituting the object of the action-theoretical questions of educational practice. They also intend to constitute the research objects in the field of educational research. However, the presented distinctions do not themselves establish an empirical research paradigm that could clarify their significance for the development of educational theory and practice. Conversely, none of the existing research paradigms ensure by their methods that educational research actually address the fundamental connections between education (*Erziehung*) and *Bildung*, teaching and learning, positive and negative experiences, or each of their significance for disciplining, instructing, and advisory educational processes.

Over the last two decades, I have focused on developing concepts that foster cooperation between the foundational theoretical distinctions introduced above and established research approaches. I have experimented with three transitions between basic pedagogical theory and empirical research and vice versa (cf. the complexity theory works of Anhalt, 2012; Rucker, 2014).

A first possibility for such connections between theory and empirical research already exists below the level of paradigmatically proven research concepts. This initiative starts off with theoretically guided practice protocols that observe disciplining, instructing, and advisory pedagogical interactions in pre-school, school, and socio-pedagogical institutions. The protocols are discussed with the pedagogical actors whose practice and pedagogical interactions have been observed. This praxis-theoretical approach was developed in close cooperation with the educationalist and pre-school teacher Sandra Piper and the Chinese educationalist Juan Gu from ECNU. It is currently being tested by them in Shanghai and Berlin/Brandenburg (for the theoretical justification, see Piper, 2018; Benner et al., 2018b; cf. also the references in Benner, 2022).

In the projects mentioned, the above-discussed basic concepts serve as points of departure for practice-theoretical descriptions of processes of education (*Erziehung*) and *Bildung*. They underpin the observation of a given practice and support the analysis of the protocols together with the pedagogical actors responsible for interactions observed. The actors first comment on the protocols by adding to them or correcting the descriptions made by the researchers. Then the practitioners and researchers confer on whether the protocols contain suggestions for a possible optimization of the observed practice that strengthens the pedagogical forms of action and the underlying causalities. Initial consultations in such teams have shown that action-theoretical protocols can be helpful for making strengths and weaknesses visible, for example in pedagogical practice in kindergartens, and to support educators in the further development of their practice.

A second initiative goes beyond practical observations. It examines existing research projects from the perspective of action theory (*Handlungstheorie*) and analyses them anew. This, however, presupposes that the projects have compatible

descriptions of practice in their data. This was the case in a pedagogical action theoretical analysis of the film *Elternschule* (Parents' School), made by Jörg Adolph and Ralph Bücheler (see Adolph & Bücheler, 2019). The film depicts inpatient therapies in the department for paediatric psychosomatics at the children's and youth clinic in Gelsenkirchen. It shows children who, due to misguided parental upbringing, had not learned to eat for themselves, to enjoy movement and to fall asleep in the evening. Instead, they had learned to refuse to eat through misguided supervision and care, and were displaying largely apathetic behaviour and suffered from severe sleep disorders. In order to release the children from the over-anxious supervision and control, the therapists first separated them from their parents and then left them to their own devices and helpless for a while. Afterwards, the therapists made interesting offers aimed at initiating a change in behaviour, which eventually, together with a newly awakened self-activity of the children, was achieved in the cases shown.

In the public debate, the film was criticized primarily by representatives of the children's rights movement, who problematised isolation from their parents and viewed the therapeutic interruption of previous upbringing as a failure to provide assistance. The scenes shown in this film reconstruct transitions from a family education practice, in which elementary principles of regulating and advisory education were not adhered to, to a therapeutic practice criticized by children's rights activists as para-pedagogical and from there to a rule-guided education practice. The therapies could legitimately be criticised as a para-pedagogical practice that violates children's rights. Simultaneously, however, it was possible to appreciate their therapeutic achievements and successes, with which they created the first prerequisites for developing new forms of coexistence in the families. This made it possible to resume education with changed rules. The action theoretical re-analysis opened up new possibilities for connecting not only psychological and educational practice, but psychological and educational research as well, and broadened the horizon of medical, psychological and educational anamnesis and educational counselling (see Benner, 2022).

A third approach was tested in two projects on modelling, testing and interpreting religious and ethical-moral competences of pupils (cf. Benner et al., 2011; Benner & Nikolova, 2016), the second of which is currently in the internationalization phase in China (see Peng, 2018; Peng et al., 2020/21). Both projects worked with the statistical methods developed by international empirical education research, but made three important adjustments to the modelling and testing of domain-specific competences.

The first project did not model the items for test tasks according to psychological models of literacy, whose tasks are abstracted from the tasks and contents of school curricula. Instead, domain-specific competences were modelled by three sub-competences that are fundamental for public education in schools. They distinguish between (a) basic knowledge to be taught in the classroom, (b) domain-specific competence in interpretation and judgement, and (c) domain-specific competence in participation and action planning. In the second, rules for designing test items were developed that involved relationships between didactic tasks and test items, and ensured that the sub-competences were defined as knowledge, judgement, consulting

and participation competences. The third transferred the concept of competence used in empirical educational research, which was developed in Germany primarily by Franz E. Weinert (2001), into an understanding of competence that does not focus on problem-solving skills but rather on problem-processing skills. The problem-processing skills are defined in terms of the ability to understand and process problems and interpret the answers found, a task that is more closely aligned with the educational mandate of public schools (see also Benner, 2020, pp. 241–276).

With these modifications, both projects succeeded in modelling religious and ethical-moral competences. They did this in such a way that instruments could be developed that describe the trajectories of competence development promoted by school-based teaching, based on the curriculum and, in addition to the characteristics such as gender, social status of the parental home, migration, etc., also considered the topics covered in class. Due to these modifications of the newly developed instruments, the research results allowed for differentiated feedback to individual classes, schools, and education administrations, providing information on the effectiveness of teaching, school reform measures, and teacher training concepts. Furthermore, they allowed for international comparisons – for example, a comparison of Europe and China – in which cultural characteristics are examined.

This approach can be expanded and can also be used to optimize other domains. It can also be used to develop sophisticated models and instruments that have been proven in educational theory (*Erziehungstheorie*), theories of educative formation (*Bildungstheorie*) and school theory that create links between pedagogical action theory and educational research for “basic first language education,” which includes not only competences in reading, writing and grammar, but also rhetorical skills, “basic mathematics education” (cf. Benner et al., 2018a), “basic science education” and “basic second language education.” The aim of the described research cooperations is not to replace the international competence research working with psychometric methods, but to supplement it with models that are grounded in educational theory. These allow conclusions to be drawn about the quality of a previous pedagogical practice and provide cues for optimizing it.

One of the non-affirmative aspects of the research concepts outlined above is that in all three variants action theoretical structures are developed without neglecting the intrinsic logic of pedagogical practice. They also do not immunize research against criticism with reference to paradigm-specific norms and self-evident features (see Merkens, 2003; Heid, 2004). Rather, they seek to bring action theory and paradigmatically proven research into an exchange that avoids uniform conceptions of theory and empiricism and focuses on the further development of educational practice and the optimization of educational research.

The Sustained Importance of Critical Non-affirmativity, Which Must Be Constantly Redefined and Reassessed

The studies on a non-affirmative theory of education (*Erziehung*), *Bildung* and educational institutions presented in the previous sections were developed at a time when “the end of general pedagogy” was predicted by some. Dieter Lenzen (1987) assessed the “Prospects of Systematic Pedagogics” as a postmodern simulation that seeks to preserve a unity that no longer exists. Such diagnoses were also the starting point for my considerations on the necessity and superfluity of a basic pedagogical approach (see Benner, 1987, pp. 13–17; 2015, pp. 17–21). Yet, research published on non-affirmative education theory has been discussed in many areas of educational research, such as general educational science, pedagogical anthropology, philosophy of education, didactics and science education, school and social pedagogy, the didactics of ethics teaching, political education, physical education and sport, religious education, the history of pedagogy and education, and, more recently, in empirical education research.

The aforementioned research was well received not only in the German-speaking world, but in other European countries (see von Oettingen, 2001, 2006, 2010; Uljens, 1998; Benner & Stepkowski, 2015b; Benner et al., 2015), as well as outside Europe, especially in China (Benner et al., 2015, 2020), Taiwan (Liang, 2002, 2012) and Japan (Benner & Ushida, 2015a). In the English-speaking world, this research has been taken up much less, with exception of Andrea English (2013) and Michael Uljens (Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017). This is partly due to the fact that the German terms *Erziehung* and *Bildung* – but also the Greek and Latin terms *paideia* and *educatio* – resist a simple translation with the English term “education.” However, the difficulties of translation are far greater than the concentration on two terms. How substantial these difficulties are became clear when the essay entitled “Bildsamkeit und Bestimmung” (Benner, 1988) was translated into English as “Malleability and Destiny” (German: *Formbarkeit und Schicksal*).

In this final section, I address five critical appraisals of my concept of non-affirmative education. The first is by Michael Winkler and Heinz-Hermann Krüger, who, from a systematic and socio-pedagogical point of view, spoke of the “rise,” “fall” and “retreat” of General Pedagogy (*Allgemeine Pädagogik*) in the mid-1990s (Winkler, 1994, p. 93 ff. ; Krüger, 1994, p. 115). Their most important objection to my theory was that my research did not develop a pivotal *general* pedagogical idea but only a school pedagogy. According to their critique, my non-affirmative education theory could not claim to be valid for social pedagogy. This view was contradicted by Klaus Mollenhauer (1996), Lothar Wigger (1996) and Jörg Ruhloff (1998). They pointed out the general relevance of the basic concepts and principles, as did Jürgen Reyer (2002) in his *Kleine Geschichte der Sozialpädagogik* (Brief History of Social Pedagogy). The latter text describes my *General Pedagogy* as dealing with “theory connections” that have fallen into oblivion in social pedagogy, and discusses basic pedagogical concepts and theories that suggest it should also be read as a “theoretical social pedagogy” (Reyer 2002, p. 270 f.).

The second critique to be mentioned here was developed by Alfred Langewand (2003), who rightly pointed out that education cannot be justified solely by the foundational concept of summoning to free self-activity (*Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit*). I can only agree with this criticism with reference to the three other basic concepts (see also Benner, 2003a, b). With reference to the three causalities in educational processes (*Erziehungs- und Bildungsprozesse*), Langewand's objection regarding the limitation of the principle of "summoning" – a concept which had been modernised by Fichte – becomes even more clear. Further, it can be combined with a distinction between action and interaction theory causalities and those causalities examined by the social sciences and empirical educational research such as gender, social milieu, migrant background, etc., whose influences cannot be denied. However, they do not affect pedagogical action directly. Rather, they must be interpreted in and transformed into pedagogical terms.

The third critique comes from the Swiss philosopher and philosophy teacher Johannes Giesinger (2011). He wrote an article in a philosophical perspective with the title *Bildsamkeit und Bestimmung. Kritische Anmerkungen zur Allgemeinen Pädagogik Dietrich Benners* (Plasticity and Determination: Critical Remarks on Dietrich Benner's General Pedagogy) in the *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*. The English translation of the title commissioned by the journal's editorial staff contains errors similar to those mentioned above. *Bestimmung* is again translated as "destiny" and *Bildsamkeit* not as "plasticity," but as "ductility" – which distorts the meaning equally, and is inconsistent with both Giesinger's and my intentions (see *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, Volume 6, issue 57, p. III). Giesinger's argumentation entails both agreement and contradictions with my concept of *Bildsamkeit*. This caused some confusion (see Ziegler, 2019, pp. 57–67). Giesinger's critique intended to show that my attempt to present *Bildsamkeit* as a constitutive principle of pedagogical action was not successful and that, instead, that goal was achieved only in his article. I can agree with this, because in the entire intellectual history of the problem, from mythical ages to Fichte and Schleiermacher, there exist many examples that achieved this that are more significant than Giesinger's and my work.

Approaching the problem historically, I too recognize the relevance of Giesinger's point when he says: "*Bildsamkeit* is to be distinguished in particular from a kind of malleability or *Bildsamkeit* that can also be attributed to objects of nature. It is therefore constitutive for pedagogical action to see the counterpart not as a malleable object to influence, but as a subject with a free will that can be shaped (*bildsam*) and is receptive to pedagogical communication" (see Giesinger, 2011, p. 908). It is lamentable, however, that while working on his text, he had considered my essay from 1988, but not my *General Pedagogy* – that indeed is mentioned in the title of his article – in its entirety. If he had been able to access the volume in its entirety, he could have spared many of the corrections interspersed in the text – for example, concerning the understanding of freedom.

The fourth critique was again focused on Fichte's basic concept of the "summoning to free self-activity" (*Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit*) and its references to the principle of *Bildsamkeit* that is not determined by status at birth and social hierarchies. This critique was developed by Norbert Ricken, who – unlike

Giesinger – agrees with the idea of “non-affirmative pedagogical action” developed in an action theoretical framework as a basis for educational theory (*Erziehungs- und Bildungstheorie*). Ricken argued that the idea of non-affirmative pedagogical action itself questions the idea of modern subjectivity (see Ricken, 1999, pp. 374–387). Ricken’s objection is that the basic idea I developed did not consistently stick to its non-affirmative mental figure: “Benner’s General Pedagogy suffers – even without using the corresponding ... concepts such as autonomy, subject, reason – ... from the abridgement and one-sidedness of the ‘modern pedagogy’ he himself rejects” (Ricken, 1999, p. 377).

Ricken links this shortcoming to two concepts, first to the concept of an inner historical “necessity” of education, which has always been present since the existence and coexistence of human beings, and, secondly, to the concept of the “summoning to self-activity” (*Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit*). He objects to the remarks on an original necessity of education, arguing that they theoretically assume a mistaken “readiness” of the child to “be educated,” which contradicts the “non-affirmativity” (which in and of itself is good) of the newly formulated concept of plasticity. He then extended his critique of theory of the subject to include the concept of education based on Fichte’s work, stating that the concept originated in an educational theory that – arguing under the rational assumptions of transcendental freedom and autonomous subjectivity – had long been overcome.

Ricken’s subject-theoretical – or better yet – subjectivity-critical objections seem to be problematic because, I argue, they refer to positions that the authors, in relation to whom I developed the foundational pedagogical idea, did not represent at all. The “illusions” of freedom, reason and autonomy that he rightly criticized following Käte Meyer-Drawe (1990/2000) are not to be found in Rousseau, Kant or Fichte, nor in Herbart and Schleiermacher. Incidentally, Meyer-Drawe problematized them in completely different contexts, forms of knowledge and paradigms, but not in those *pedagogical* positions to which I refer. A critique that directs these illusions on classical pedagogical theories of education is in danger of dismissing traditions with arguments that anticipated Ricken’s criticism of “modern” pedagogy (see Brüggem, 1986; Brinkmann, 1999; Benner, 2017). It has to be recognised that Ricken himself made significant contributions to overcoming the pedagogical paradox, which, as I argue, pursue similar questions as the basic idea that I have developed.

The last critique to be mentioned here does not aim to overcome the educational concept of modern subjectivity. It comes from Alfred Schäfer, who in his study “Zur Genealogie der Pädagogik” (On the Genealogy of Pedagogy) dedicated a large section to my General Pedagogy (Schäfer, 2012, pp. 300–315). Therein, he presents my educational theory as an attempt to deal with the normativity of pedagogical action without the need to ultimately justify and unify pedagogical theory and practice:

Benner’s effort leaves behind both a modern transcendental-philosophical perspective of justification and the attempts to formulate an empirical-transcendental debate; at the same time, however, he claims to solve the problem of the pedagogical (and thus also of the social) aspect by means of an action-theoretical and problem-historical assurance. If the basic pedagogical thought process is to be interpreted “with regard to historically defined

questions and problems,” it cannot be naively assumed that such an interpretation expresses the ontological truth of the problem, of the necessity itself – it remains disputed. Rather, conversely, the interpretation of the basic thought process that takes place alongside action-historical and problem-historical assurances can be used to conclude the existence of such a pre-reflexive necessity that generates pedagogical thinking and action. Such a conclusion is never possible with absolute certainty. Benner’s precondition, however – with reference to a problem to be solved pedagogically – is the decision for an action-theoretical perspective (Schäfer, 2012, p. 302).

In his analysis from 2012, Schäfer presents a highly significant examination of my *General Pedagogy*, especially in the problematizing references. Like no other, Schäfer grasped the efforts underlying my *General Pedagogy* to develop a non-affirmative practical theory. He has pointed out that it presupposes the existence of a world in which meaningful and rational action is possible in differentiated practices, without any of them being given priority over the others or even an overall primacy based on a substantial idea of good. At the same time, he pointed out that human freedom of choice, not between predetermined alternatives, but the choice itself, can also be a disturbing, even despairing thought, in which Kierkegaard did not see a sufficient reason for a specified “moral quality” of human practice, but rather an “abyss” of human existence (ibid., p. 306; see also Schäfer, 2004).

I deem Kierkegaard’s despair regarding the abyss of human freedom to be a necessary corrective to the program of a “higher development of humanity” in a neo-Kantian sense, to which I have referred in my first studies on a basic pedagogical thought process (see Benner, 1980, 1983). I excluded this from the first edition of my *General Pedagogy* in favour of the concept of a non-hierarchical nature of the differentiated areas of practice. By substituting the concept of a rational higher development of humanity by that of non-hierarchical human practices and fields of action, I sought a way out of the *aporia* that there are transgressions in human history. A transgression above all are the crimes committed by Germans during the National Socialist dictatorship with the industrial-scale destruction of human life – that cannot be improved or even remedied by any idea of a higher development of humanity as a telos of history and the goal of education. The foundational idea of my *General Pedagogy* tries to do without the idea of a higher development. It rejects any hierarchization of social sub-practices as a model for problem-solving and instead relies on an unsolvable tension/conflict between the inherent logic of work, ethics, pedagogy, politics, art and religion, which must be reflected upon, sustained and discussed again and again.

One might now ask whether this conflict between forms of practice might not in themselves be a reason for despair over human freedom and powerlessness. Given historical experiences, we conclude that there is no such protection against despair that could provide the assurance of reason for human thinking and acting. Nevertheless, I consider the demand to let go of any ideas of a valid hierarchical order of all of human practice to be rational and helpful. In any case, further assurances are not absolutely necessary for determining the experimental rationality structure of pedagogical action. Even those who seek them in the field of religion

can despair of questions that cannot be resolved by a history of salvation (cf. Mark 15:34; Matthew 26:46; see also Benner, 1987, p. 28; 2015, p. 37, footnote 10).

No form of practice can legitimize itself through references to a substantive idea of the good; an entity that protects against despair does not exist for human practice. Conversely, this implies that despair in itself is not sufficient to dismiss experimental structures of rationality and fruitful tensions between positive and negative experiences. Non-affirmativity is rationally allowed, even if transitions to affirmations that can no longer be problematized do not exist.

For the further discussion about affirmativity and non-affirmativity in pedagogical practice, theory development and research, it is important to think of the distinction between affirmativity and non-affirmativity as a reflective, rather than a dogmatic distinction (cf. Rucker, 2021). It does not create self-evident certainties, but perhaps a framework that must be evaluated again and again in pedagogical practice and other fields of action and in the development of reflective theories.

Here I conclude my considerations on non-affirmativity in education (*Erziehung und Bildung*) and pedagogical institutions. I did not claim that affirmations are avoidable, nor that non-affirmativity is a positive goal to strive for. Dealing with affirmativity in a non-affirmative way is not a programmatic, but rather an eminently theoretical, reflective and also practical undertaking, which one can doubt but does not have to despair over. This is referred to in the final sentence of a treatise by the French philosopher and sinologist François Jullien (1998/2001), entitled *Un sage est sans idée. Ou l'autre de la philosophie* (A wise man lacks ideas. Or the other of Philosophy) that confronts European with Chinese, and the Chinese with European traditions of philosophy and thought. Alfred Schäfer recommended it to me during a conversation. Its reads, in a modified version with regard to the thoughts under discussion here: Wisdom and prudence do not need to be based on an eternal idea.

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Part II
Non-affirmative Interpretations of *Didaktik*

Chapter 3

Knowledge, Values and Subject-ness: Educative Teaching as a Regulative Idea of School Development in the Twenty-First Century



Thomas Rucker

Abstract This chapter focuses on the question of an educationally justified orientation of school teaching in the context of modern democratic societies. According to my thesis, school teaching that is understood as non-affirmative must consequently be conceived as educative teaching, or more precisely as educative teaching under the claim of *Bildung*. To justify this assertion, I first describe non-affirmative education as an irreducible nexus of discipline, teaching, and guidance. Then, I try to show how school teaching can be conceptualized as educative teaching under the claim of *Bildung*. Finally, I develop a conceptual framework for distinguishing between different dimensions of non-affirmativity, each of which is significant in the context of educative teaching. Taken together, these considerations bring into view a regulative idea of school development that should not be ignored if one does not want to fall behind an already achieved level within educational theory.

Keywords Educative teaching · *Bildung* · Didactics · School development · Non-affirmativity

Introduction

In the 1980s, school research “discovered” the development of the individual school as a theoretical problem. In particular, the realization that individual schools can develop into schools of different quality under the same or similar conditions was central to this problem. Helmut Fend therefore referred to the individual school as a “pedagogical unit of action” [*pädagogische Handlungseinheit*] (Fend, 1986, 275), thus expressing the insight that the development of the individual school is subject to a dynamic of its own, relatively independent of state-imposed school reforms.

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M. Uljens (ed.), *Non-affirmative Theory of Education and Bildung*,
Educational Governance Research 20,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30551-1_3

In short: The question of quality is decided in the individual school. This institution has therefore increasingly been recognized as a world of its own and has been thematized, for example, as an organizational culture, that is, as an order that is produced by local actors – especially teachers – and that then itself influences further interactions. It is this order that contributes decisively to rendering the individual school relatively resistant to interventions “from outside.” To this day, the problem of clarifying the prerequisites, possibilities, and limits of school development [*Schulentwicklung*] and of school development consulting [*Schulentwicklungsberatung*] that supports the development of the individual school remains unresolved in school research (see Rolff, 2018).

At this point, the question arises regarding the conditions under which development processes of the individual school can be described as legitimate from an educational perspective, at least if one does not want to claim that the development of the individual school – in whatever direction – can per se already be judged as educationally legitimate. In this sense, Wolfgang Schönig explicitly draws attention to the fact “that educational science should at least be able to offer an orientation framework that names the minimum requirements for school quality” (Schönig, 2000, 92). Insofar as “school development” and “school development consulting” can neither gain the “criteria for the improvement of school quality from within themselves, nor be value-neutral, nor leave the search for criteria solely to the schools or to the public discourse” (ibid.), both are dependent on a theory in which an educational-theoretically [*erziehungstheoretisch*], *Bildung*-theoretically [*bildungstheoretisch*], and institutional-theoretically [*institutionentheoretisch*] reflected description of school is developed, which could function as a guiding idea of school development and school development consulting.

In this chapter, I would like to explore how *school teaching* can be described in light of a theory of non-affirmative education. I start from the assumption that this theory implies an idea of teaching that could function as an educationally justified point of reference for school development and school development consulting, and that furthermore indicates a theoretical level beneath which public debates about schooling in the twenty-first century should not fall. School teaching that is conceived as non-affirmative, according to my thesis, must consequently be conceived as *educative teaching*, or more precisely: as educative teaching under the claim of *Bildung* [*erziehender Unterricht mit Bildungsanspruch*]. In order to substantiate this assertion, I will primarily argue systematically and describe educative teaching as a specific kind of teaching that “transcends” school subjects in specific respects. Such teaching links the thematization of knowledge with questions of the good life and of good living together [*Fragen eines gelingenden Lebens und Zusammenlebens*] and, in addition, brings students to reflect on the assumptions on which specific knowledge and specific value judgments are based.

The chapter is structured as follows: In a first step, I briefly explain the basic idea of a theory of non-affirmative education, discussing the difference between affirmative and non-affirmative education on the one hand and different basic forms of non-affirmative education on the other (1). In a second step, I situate school teaching in the context of these three basic forms and show how it can be conceived as

educative teaching under the claim of *Bildung* (2). In a third step, I will develop a framework that allows us to distinguish different dimensions of non-affirmativity that are important in the context of educative teaching and that must be taken into account if school development and school development consulting are to be oriented towards this idea of school teaching (3).

Non-affirmative Education as Discipline, Teaching and Guidance

Human beings – this is the basic premise of the following considerations – are *imperfect* beings who exist in the necessity to act. By acting, human beings bring forth culture, whereby culture is understood here in a broad sense. It is not limited to literature, art, philosophy or religion, but also includes natural science, technology, politics or economy. By creating culture, human beings turn around their imperfection without being able to overcome it. Against this background, education can be understood as a reaction to a certain permanent problem [*Dauerproblem*] of human life and coexistence. This problem consists in the fact that culture is not genetically inherited, but has to be acquired. *Education* can be understood as the specific form of interaction in which people help other people to acquire culture. In this sense, education reacts in equal measure to the mortality problem [*Mortalitätsproblem*] – culture must be handed down – and the natality problem [*Natalitätsproblem*] – people must be introduced to culture (see Sünkel, 2013).

Unlike a description of education as *affirmative* – reducing it to a means of enforcing social expectations of the next generation – a description of *non-affirmative* education focuses on education as a traditional *and* transforming inter-generational practice (see Benner, 1990). In this context, the question of what to favour or disfavour in living and living together is understood as a question that has not been answered before all education, so that education would only have to pass on answers that have already been found. Instead, non-affirmative education hands over the aforementioned question *as a question*. This includes helping newcomers to reflect on answers that others have already found in their search for orientation. But these answers do not provide a standard to which education would have to be oriented. Rather, they become the object of discussion in education itself – which of course implies that children and young people may transform tradition in their own way.

Given this background, to describe education as non-affirmative can be interpreted as an attempt to define an education in which the newcomers' thinking, judging and acting are not standardized. Non-affirmative education differs from an affirmative-conservative education [*affirmative-bewahrende Erziehung*] and an affirmative-emancipative education [*affirmativ-emanzipative Erziehung*] in that young people are called upon to make their own judgments and to act on the basis of those judgments. It is precisely in this regard that such an understanding of

education itself proves to be non-neutral. Rather, it expresses a normative position specifically directed against attempts to instrumentalize education for the implementation of extra-educational purposes. Non-affirmative education may well be prompted by social expectations addressed to the next generation, but it does not affirm these expectations. Rather, it treats them as determinations [*Bestimmungen*] generated by people; determinations that – since people are imperfect beings – eventually can be reconsidered as elements of and jumping off points for the future interplay between the individual and the world (see Reichenbach, 2001, 410ff.).

The specific task of non-affirmative education, traditionally referred to as *Bildung*, is that children and young people be drawn into this interplay and helped in relating to “external” demands. Accordingly, non-affirmative education can be described as the enabling of *Bildung* [*Ermöglichung von Bildung*] – and thus as a form of interaction that does not only consist of introducing newcomers to culture, but rather addresses them in a specific sense *as subjects* – that is, offers them the opportunity to examine claims to validity (see Rucker, 2020, 56ff.). This must not be misunderstood as relativistic, but includes the fact that newcomers are confronted with a resistant world [*widerständige Welt*] in order to provoke experiences of difference [*Differenzerfahrungen*], which can be an occasion to test and transcend existing patterns of relating to self and world. Conversely, education does not only mean confronting newcomers with a resistant world: It always also implies opening up the possibility for them to develop their own positions by working through experiences of difference.

Education “that gives thought to what is worthy of becoming and remaining the content and task of one’s life” (Ballauff, 1989, 625) thus means inviting adolescents to “think through well-considered questions” and at the same time letting them “experience the difficulty of well-founded answers” (ibid., 633). In short: “*Bildung* does not mean feeling comfortable; rather, it involves becoming uncomfortable” (ibid., 627). At the same time, the positions that newcomers develop are not determined in advance, but emerge, are maintained and changed in the self-active dealing of the individual with a resistant world.

The notion of understanding education as introducing newcomers to the search for orientation of a good life and living together and – connected with this – to treat “the question of what it means to be human as a radically open question” (Biesta, 2006, 4) is irreducibly connected to the concept of *Bildsamkeit*. Indeed, to conceive of the human being as *bildsam* means to focus on him or her as the “being of principled openness, the being that is not determined” [*das Wesen der prinzipiellen Offenheit, das nicht festgestellte Wesen*] (Buck, 1984, 135). If we assume that education should address newcomers as human beings, and if we further assume that humans are indeterminate beings [*unbestimmte Wesen*], it follows that education should introduce newcomers into the world in such a way that their future way of living [*Lebensform*] remains open. Paradoxically formulated: Education addresses children and young people as human beings precisely when it keeps open the question of what it means to be human. In this sense, the concept of *Bildsamkeit* fulfils the function of a principle, which refers to the educational interaction and confronts it with the demand to summon newcomers to self-activity [*Selbsttätigkeit*], that is,

to open up possibilities of participation [*Mitwirkung*]. Education can only do justice to the “indeterminate *Bildsamkeit*” of the “growing human being” if it refrains from determining newcomers according to traditional claims to validity and instead “challenges their power of judgment” (Brüggen, 1998, 118). This includes helping children and young people to “retrospectively” criticize and – under certain circumstances – transcend patterns of thought and action they have already developed in the course of growing up (see Stojanov, 2008, 104).

In the tradition of modern pedagogy, various basic forms of non-affirmative education have been distinguished – forms that can neither be derived from, substituted for or reduced to each other. Since the work *The Science of Education: Its General Principles Deduced from Its Aim* [*Allgemeine Pädagogik aus dem Zweck der Erziehung abgeleitet*] (1806/1908) by Johann Friedrich Herbart, these include a disciplinary education [*regierende Erziehung*], an education by teaching [*Erziehung durch Unterricht*], and an education as guidance [*beratende Erziehung*].¹ In the following, I will briefly explain each of these basic forms in order to provide the context for my reflections on educative teaching.

Discipline is understood as a form of education aimed at preventing harm that children and young people might suffer or inflict on themselves or others if they were not restrained from acting in a certain way. In this sense, discipline can take the form of both guarding [*Behüten*] and counteracting [*Gegenwirken*]. One might think of the situation where a father grabs his daughter’s hand to stop her from chasing a ball rolling down the street. But think also of the situation where a teacher admonishes students who are talking about their weekend activities during a lesson. Discipline in this sense always means enforcing certain rules. The claim to validity associated with the respective rules is not at issue in the context of this basic form of education.

Discipline is necessary if children and young people are not yet able to act in light of their own judgments. Conversely, disciplinary education is subject to certain demands if newcomers are to be addressed as *bildsam* (see Herbart, 1806/1908, 95f.). Discipline operates *negatively*, that is, it prevents children and young people from acting in a certain way. In this sense, disciplinary education differs, for example, from behavioral conditioning, which seeks to generate dispositions to behave in a certain way, that is, to determine the newcomer’s will in specific respects. Furthermore, the claim is that discipline must end as soon as children and young people are able to subject their will to their own judgment and to act in *this* sense.

Teaching is the basic form of education in which children and young people are involved in a self-acting dealing with content (objects, topics). In teaching, newcomers are confronted with knowledge that is classified in a culture as worthy of being handed down, but which cannot be acquired in everyday interactions with people. Newcomers can learn how to use a smartphone to make phone calls, take photos or download apps in everyday interaction. However, they cannot learn

¹I am adopting a translation of the Herbartian terms *Regierung*, *Unterricht*, and *Zucht* proposed by Andrea English (see English, 2013, 3ff.).

through everyday interaction the technology that makes these activities possible in the first place. Any successful transmission of knowledge about the technological prerequisites of smartphones necessarily presupposes that everyday interaction is interrupted and transformed into the artificial form of education that we call teaching.

In contrast to discipline, as students newcomers are not prevented from acting, but are prompted to delve into and reflect on certain content through questioning and pointing activities [*Frage- und Zeigeaktivitäten*], in order to gain insight into something the adult generation considers significant: “Come closer, and have a look, this is fascinating! It is worthy of your effort. I invite you to engage with it” (Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2019, 527). This common reference of teachers and students to specific cultural objects is constitutive for teaching, and also includes a dealing with the rules that are enforced in the context of disciplinary education. In general, there are mutual dependencies between discipline and teaching. Education by teaching is dependent on education by discipline insofar as it requires a kind of order that makes teaching possible in the first place. This order cannot be established by teaching, but requires a form of education that does not thematize rules, but rather enforces them. Conversely, discipline is therefore dependent on teaching, because rules must not merely be enforced if education is to address newcomers as subjects. Rather, a form of interaction is required in which rules can be thematized, examined and – under certain circumstances – problematized.

In contrast to discipline and teaching, *guidance* is neither aimed at preventing newcomers from acting, nor at introducing them to knowledge and inviting them to critically examine it. Instead, guidance is meant to help children and young people to act in light of their own insights and judgments, that is, to support them in concrete *questions of their own way of life in relation to the lives of others*. Guidance in this sense can be said to occur, for example, when options for action are suggested to newcomers that they had not previously considered, when children and young people are asked to reconsider their own plans for action, or when newcomers are encouraged to put their plans into practice.

The fact that guidance should support children and young people in orienting themselves in their lives on their own judgments is consequent, if education is understood as enabling *Bildung*. As such, guidance is aimed not at standardizing the newcomers’ way of life, but at helping them to search for, find and develop their own way of life. Addressing newcomers in this sense as *bildsam* must not be misunderstood as subjectivistic. If one assumes that self-determination requires a free space – space that is not necessarily given in the interaction between people, but that must be continually established and stabilized – then it follows that guidance must also strive to help children and young people develop the attitude of limiting themselves in order to also leave other people free spaces or to open up to them in the first place, to choose *their* way of life. Guidance then means confronting newcomers with the question of “whether what we desire is desirable for our own lives and the lives we live with others” (Biesta, 2017, 16). Such addressing is aimed at thwarting the self-centeredness of children and young people, as it were, thus opening up to them the possibility of distancing themselves from their desires and transforming

them. If one assumes that living together in plurality presupposes people's willingness and ability to limit themselves, then the interruption of the self-centeredness of newcomers can indeed be called "the fundamental educational gesture" (ibid., 17).

Educative Teaching and the Public School

Although teaching takes place outside the classroom, it is institutionalized in particular in the specific context of schools. School teaching must therefore be understood as a specific form of teaching that differs in several respects from both non-institutionalized and alternative forms of institutionalized teaching: It takes place at fixed times and in fixed places, teachers and students deal with the same subject matter over longer periods of time, the prerequisites and purposes of teaching are fixed, the rooms are provided specifically for teaching purposes, teachers carry out their activity professionally, etc. As Henz-Elmar Tenorth states, a "thematically bound communication" and – connected to it – a "subject-bound competence of the teachers and a performance evaluation according to curricular quality standards" can be regarded as central aspects for school teaching. However, if learning is to gain the "character of *Bildung*," orientation to "subject-specific standards that societies agree upon and declare necessary" is not sufficient. If the task of teaching is to give students the opportunity to acquire the "cognitive and normative prerequisites for self-determined action in society" (Tenorth, 2016, 146), then one must consider that what is learned in the context of subject teaching [*Fachunterricht*] as such does not yet have any significance with regard to the way children and young people lead their lives in interaction with others.

Teaching that is understood as the initiation and support of *Bildung* processes must meet certain requirements – at least if one understands *Bildung* as a process of developing the ability to self-determination in the confrontation with a resistant world. *Bildung* then means that a person learns to lead his or her life in a self-determined way, whereby such a process implies, among other things, the development of objective insights [*sachliche Einsichten*], one's own value judgments [*eigene Werturteile*], and the ability to correspond to one's own judgments in one's actions (see Rucker, 2020, 56ff.). One can only speak meaningfully of a self-determined way of life if one acts according to one's own judgments. Thus, we would not speak of self-determination if someone makes his or her own judgments but is not able to act upon them, that is, to actually lead his or her life in light of these judgments. To act according to one's own judgments, one must make one's own judgments in the first place. Thus, we would not speak of self-determination if someone agrees with positions or rejects positions without examining them and finding his or her own position. Finally, forming one's own judgment presupposes objective insights. How would one want to position oneself in relation to an issue without being able to base one's judgments on knowledge about the issue? To put it pointedly: "Bildung" is "knowledge" about culture "plus self-reflection," and thus a

process in which a person “brings him- or herself into play as a judging and acting subject in relation to his or her culture” (Brüggen, 1999, 60).

Against this background, teaching under the claim of *Bildung* must be conceived as educative teaching, in which students should not only acquire objective insights, but also be given the opportunity to consider the relevance [*Bedeutsamkeit*] of what they have learned for their own lives in interaction with others. This is due to the fact that teaching aims to free students for a life of self-determination, while the knowledge to be acquired is indifferent in its relevance for the lives of the children and young people. If it is not to be left to chance whether students relate acquired knowledge to their own way of life, it follows that the question of the relevance of knowledge must itself become a topic within school teaching (see Rucker, 2019, 649ff.).

Consequently, teaching under the claim of *Bildung* does not only mean an introduction to knowledge; it is also related to enabling students to lead a self-determined life, which includes supporting the development of one’s own positions. Conversely, the positions whose development is to be initiated and supported are mediated through an acquisition of knowledge. The students are to be enabled to position themselves on questions of a good life and living together in the light of objective insights.

It is the making of value judgments that provides a link between knowledge and the lives of the students. Against this background, educational teaching in public schools can also be understood as value-oriented subject teaching [*wertorientierter Fachunterricht*] – as a form of interaction in which students are summoned to ask questions about the relevance of what they have learned for their own lives and, conversely, to subject already developed value judgments to scrutiny in the light of objective insights. This task is not restricted to certain subjects, but represents an “interdisciplinary task,” which generally should be taken into account if “knowledge, attitude [*Haltung*] and possible action” are to be related to each other and thus support the “*Bildung* of the students” (Rekus, 1993, 196). In short: “Teaching is only ‘complete’ from an educational perspective if it relates the knowledge to be acquired to the value orientation of the students and thus contributes to a responsible way of living” (ibid., 199).

In order to clarify what is meant here by educational teaching under the claim of *Bildung*, I believe it would be helpful to distinguish this from teaching without value education [*Unterricht ohne Werterziehung*] on the one hand and value education without teaching [*Wernerziehung ohne Unterricht*] on the other. *Teaching without value education* involves introducing newcomers to knowledge without asking them to evaluate the relevance of this knowledge for their own life in interaction with others. Such teaching would not be compatible with the claim to help adolescents to lead a self-determined life. However, we would speak of *value education without teaching* if children and young people were urged to perform certain actions without being given the opportunity to make their own judgments and to act in

accordance with them. This possibility is denied to newcomers by the fact that they are not introduced to existing knowledge. Children and young people are unlikely to be able to position themselves in relation to facts about which they have no knowledge. For example, someone who does not know how the coronavirus is transmitted will hardly be able to judge the value of wearing masks. Against this background, the methods and means of value education without teaching are different: Instead of initiating and supporting value judgments, teachers use rewards and punishments to encourage newcomers to act in certain ways and to promote the development of specific attitudes. The task of helping children and young people to lead a self-determined life is therefore also undermined by value education without teaching.

To summarize: Both teaching without value education and value education without teaching undermine the claim of *Bildung*. Teaching is dependent on value education, insofar as knowledge is indifferent with regard to the life of the student. Value education is dependent on teaching insofar as the student's own value judgments are only possible if he or she has acquired knowledge about the issues that are to be judged. Without teaching, value education would only be possible in an affirmative sense. However, this problem cannot be solved by *combining* the introduction to knowledge with some kind of behavioral conditioning. Such a combination does not contribute to a non-affirmative orientation of school teaching. This would rather require that students are both confronted with traditional claims to validity and given the opportunity to relate to these claims. Educative teaching in this sense means introducing students to the practice of giving and asking for reasons, which enables a "justified rejection or acceptance" (Schilmöller, 1994, 352) of claims to validity in the first place.

Educative teaching that seeks to make *Bildung* possible is not solely aimed at *qualifying* and *socializing* students. Rather, such teaching is also and above all characterized by a task that Biesta calls *subjectification* (see Biesta, 2020). In my view, it would be misleading to regard qualification, socialization, and the "coming into present" of subjects as three separate tasks of educative teaching. Rather – as Biesta also explicitly states – these must be considered as mutually related to each other. Educative teaching introduces newcomers to traditional knowledge. However, such teaching is not limited to learning something; the students should also be given the opportunity to relate to what they have learned [*sich zu Gelerntem in ein Verhältnis setzen*]. Again, this does not mean that children and young people should not be confronted with values and norms. On the contrary, teachers present and represent these values and norms. But they should not do so in a way that enforces claims to validity. Rather, children and young people should be invited to examine claims to validity so that they have the opportunity to bring *their perspective* into play, to develop their own value orientation in the confrontation with traditional values and norms, and to be able to discuss their positions intergenerationally.

Dimensions of Non-affirmativity

Here I would like to systematically describe the non-affirmative orientation of educative teaching. For this purpose, I distinguish four dimensions of non-affirmativity. This framework should help us to distinguish more precisely what we mean by non-affirmative school teaching.

Objective Insight

Educative teaching proves to be non-affirmative insofar as knowledge is understood as answers to questions and the work on these questions is placed in the center of teaching. Teachers therefore must first make a subject matter questionable [*fragwürdig*] for and accessible [*zugänglich*] to the students, and then support the students in searching for and finding answers to their questions in the interplay of delving [*Vertiefung*] into and reflecting [*Besinnung*] on a matter. These answers are either methods themselves, developed in response to certain questions, or results of the use of specific methods. It follows that teaching must be realized in such a way that the “immanent-methodical character” (Klafki, 1985/2007, 123) of knowledge is taken into account by supporting students in following the path towards a certain knowledge in a simplified form. This means that the subject matter is not presented in a complete form; rather, the students are encouraged to discover the structure of the subject matter step by step.

Educative teaching is recognizable by the fact that students are not only encouraged to understand the structure of a content, but are also asked to examine the validity claims that play a role in this context. This does not exclude phases of instruction [*Unterweisung*]. Conversely, it is quite possible to realize teaching as instruction, that is, in such a way that an examination of claims to validity is left out, which is why educative teaching should not be regarded as the normal case or even as a triviality. Phases of instruction must be justifiable in the context of educative teaching in relation to its task of enabling newcomers to gain objective insight, that is, they must be shown to be a necessary prerequisite for children and young people to become involved in a self-active dealing with the subject at all. For example, students must first be taught the names of the sides of a right-angled triangle before they can grasp the Pythagorean theorem and work through various possible proofs. Conversely, teaching in mathematics in which the corresponding proofs were left out would be judged as deficient – at least if *Bildung* should be made possible for students. In this case, the newcomers are denied the possibility to gain insight into the Pythagorean theorem, namely, to accept the associated claims to validity *in freedom*. To put it simply: “The learner should pick up [*aufnehmen*] and keep [*behalten*], in other words he or she should learn, in the elementary meaning of the word, but only *accept* [annehmen] as true that which he or she has tested and scrutinized” (Koch, 2015, 71).

This requires specific activities from the teachers. They must explore the students' already acquired knowledge, bring them to clarify that knowledge, and finally connect to the clarified prior knowledge if it is to be expanded. In order to initiate and support such an expansion, teachers must ask questions and point to something that students do not yet "see." In addition, they have to give and demand reasons, and finally summon their students to check the validity of the knowledge "imparted" in this sense.

The delving into and reflection on a subject matter imply the students' confrontation with their own ignorance [*Nichtwissen*]. Experiences of difference in this sense are constitutive for the formation of judgment, because they are the trigger for the students' search for orientation in the first place, in which – if successful – they find a knowledge that allows them to overcome their ignorance regarding a specific issue. Therefore, in educative teaching, newcomers are confronted with questions that serve as an occasion to deal with a subject matter and to find answers to these questions, that is, to "develop" knowledge by thinking for themselves.

The knowledge that is to be acquired has, of course, long been known and is, at best, rediscovered by the newcomers. Therefore, it is only appropriate that non-affirmative teaching is understood as an invitation to "think for oneself," while at the same time the invitation is specified as help "to find knowledge independently" (Klafki, 1999, 115). This does not mean, however, that an introduction to knowledge cannot address children and young people as subjects. In this context, however, their participation [*Mitwirkung*] takes on a specific form. This consists in the fact that students are involved in a self-active dealing with a subject matter, in which the possibility opens up for them not to have to accept knowledge unquestioned, but to accept it because it proves to be convincing in an examination of validity claims. This is what I mean when I say that educative teaching under the claim of *Bildung* is aimed at enabling students to gain objective insight [*sachliche Einsicht*]. Such enabling of objective insight, in turn, means nothing else than inviting students to participate in the differentiation of their "circle of thought," [*Gedankenkreis*], that is, addressing them as *bildsam*.

Own Value Judgment

Educative teaching can also be understood as non-affirmative in that students are summoned to make their own value judgments in light of objective insights. Teachers do not answer the question of how we should live and live together in order to force students to orient themselves towards these answers. Rather, educative teaching under the claim of *Bildung* is characterized by the fact that students are searching for orientation in questions of a good life and living together in order to find their own answers. In this context, of course, traditional answers also play a role; after all, newcomers should be given the opportunity to find their positions with regard to an already achieved level of addressing questions of the good life and living together. However, the respective answers – and this is decisive here – do not

provide the standards by which orientation would have to be found. Rather, these answers to questions of the good life and living together become objects of discussion within a search for orientation that is open to the future, and in this sense they function as “problem answers to be critically thought through” rather than as “phenomena to be enforced” (Fischer, 1972, 132).

Value-oriented teaching in this sense aims at developing one’s own judgments and not at the unquestioned acquirement of given value judgments. The matter of which claims to validity associated with specific value orientations can be accepted and which must be rejected is treated *as a question*, that is, in such a way that no particular answer is established in advance as the correct one. In educative teaching under the claim of *Bildung*, students are not required to accept unquestioningly conceptions of a good life and living together. Rather, recognizing students as *bildsam* means opening up to them the possibility of interpreting, examining, problematizing, and – under certain circumstances – renegotiating traditional value orientations.

However, the development of one’s own value judgments must not be misunderstood in a relativistic way. This is because the positions that students are asked to develop are statements in relation to a *resistant world*. This resistance plays a role in value-oriented teaching not only insofar as students are encouraged to take a position in the light of *objective insights*. The resistance of the world also comes to the fore when *others* judge an issue *differently*. Therefore, summoning students to make their own value judgments does not imply that teachers have to accept every one of their judgments. Educative teaching should rather be interpreted as an attempt to avoid both Scylla and Charybdis by trying to banish the danger of relativism without standardizing the judgments of newcomers. The proposal is to confront students with a resistant world, to help them work through experiences of difference, and to encourage them to re-expose the positions they have developed to the resistance of the world.

For students, this confrontation with a resistant world includes a confrontation with the expectation that they take into account other people’s claim to freedom in their value judgments. However, it would be incompatible with the claim of *Bildung* if one were to thus conclude that it is necessary to commit students at least to those values expressing an endorsement for plurality. At this point, educative teaching aimed at enabling *Bildung* should rather be understood as an attempt to initiate and support processes of decentering in which the student is involved as subject. Such an attempt to open up the development of one’s own value judgment to include the perspectives of others, without standardizing them, essentially consists in confronting students with the question of whether their own positions can be justified with regard to the idea of equal freedom for everyone (see Rucker, 2021a, b). Such a confrontation is not only aimed at thwarting the self-centeredness of children and young people, but also opens up the possibility for them to step back from held views of a good life and living together, in order to examine and eventually transform them.

Many-Sidedness

“Many-sidedness” is the concept used in the context of the theory of educative teaching to respond to the fact that life and living together in modern societies take place under the conditions of complexity. Complex societies confront us in almost all areas with an irreducible *perspectivity* and with *dynamics* that are open to the future. In modern democratic societies, issues are described from different perspectives, without one perspective being able to claim general validity. Moreover, the interplay of perspectives is not fixed to a specific order. Orders emerge, are maintained and changed, and in this sense are always only temporarily stable. Modern society is *complex* because there is no known rule that would allow us to transform the interplay of perspectives into an order that is accepted by all and stable in the long run (see Rucker & Anhalt, 2017, 13ff.).

In modern democratic societies, an irreducible “difference of perspectives” has become established, leading to a “multiple coding of reality” (Nassehi, 2017, 61ff.). Different fields (politics, science, religion, art, etc.) have developed, each functioning according to its own rules, making it impossible to grasp the world as a totality. The reference to issues (also to modern society itself) is never possible as a “view from nowhere” (Nagel), but rather always from a certain perspective, under the conditions of a complex society.

In educational theory, this social development seems to have been anticipated early on. Johann Friedrich Herbart, for example, explicitly spoke of a “division of ways of life” (Herbart, 1810/1964, 78) and conceived of educative teaching with regard to the expectation of enabling students to develop a “many-sidedness of interest” (Herbart, 1806/1908, 122ff.). The concept of interest should not be interpreted hastily in a psychological way. In my opinion, Herbart also uses the term in the sense of “inter esse,” that is “to be in between.” I would like to interpret *interest* as the name for the fact that newcomers have learned to be “with the thing,” that is, have gained insight into a subject matter. Interest can be described as *many-sided* when insights have been gained not only from one perspective, but in the light of different perspectives, and the children and young people have developed the ability to understand and judge a matter not only in the horizon of everyday interaction, but also with regard to the broader horizons of science, art, politics and religion.

According to this reading, “many-sidedness of interest” represents the task of educative teaching to help students to learn to “recognize an issue in its objective complexity [*in seiner objektiven Vielgesichtigkeit erkennen*]” (Ramseger, 1993, 833) and – in connection with this – to further develop their already acquired ability to judge into a “many-sided ability to make value judgments” [*vielseitige Werturteilsfähigkeit*] (Rekus, 1993, 75). In this sense, “many-sidedness of interest” can be interpreted as a concept that takes into account growing up in complex societies. Without a correspondingly differentiated order of the relationship to the self and the world, it might be difficult, perhaps even impossible, to lead one’s life in a self-determined way in the context of such a society. On the other hand, Herbart was

sure: “The man of many-sided culture [*Bildung*] possesses a many-sided equipment” (Herbart, 1806/1908, 258).

At this point, we can consider another dimension of non-affirmativity, which is related to the idea of a “many-sided *Bildung*” and – connected to this – the idea of a “many-sided teaching.” By drawing students into situations in which they are challenged to look at issues from different perspectives, the development of a multidimensional relationship to self and world is to be initiated and supported. Many-sidedness in this sense does not only involve changing perspectives in order to understand and judge issues in their different aspects. What is decisive here is that the development of the ability to relate perspectives to one another goes hand in hand with the fact that newcomers are given the opportunity to relativize claims to validity. This means that educative teaching can also be understood as non-affirmative in the sense that students are not committed to take certain perspectives, but are rather enabled to relate perspectives to other perspectives. By making “teaching” a space for “exploring different ways of looking at reality,” not only can “prejudices” be irritated; “[S]howing the world in the mirror of different perspectives” also allows one to relativize the “truth claim of a single perspective” (Dunker, 1999, 51). This, in turn, allows students to reject the expectation of recognizing a particular perspective as the only correct one by opening up alternative horizons of understanding and judgment. This dimension of non-affirmativity cannot be derived from, reduced to, or replaced by the previously discussed dimensions. Instead, the non-affirmativity that characterizes a many-sided teaching proves to be original: An orientation towards many-sidedness challenges students’ fixation on specific perspectives by giving them the opportunity to consider alternatives and to strive for objective insights and personal value judgments in the *interplay of perspectives*.

Radical Consideration

The confrontation with a resistant world – whether through traditional knowledge or alternative value orientations – should open up the possibility for children and young people to emancipate themselves from determinations that they have acquired unquestioningly during their upbringing. Educative teaching summons newcomers to examine claims of validity in order to gain objective insight and reach their own judgments. However, this process of emancipation from unquestioned notions would still not be considered consistent if, in the context of an educative teaching, one did not also take into account that these reorientations themselves are based on specific presuppositions, which would have to be addressed, examined and – under certain circumstances – problematized. “Prejudices pervade our thinking, conditioning it and at the same time enabling it” (Ballauff, 2004, 75). From this follows: “Thinking must become its own opponent [*Denken muss sein eigener Gegner werden*]” if students are not to become “prisoners” of presuppositions “that initially allow us to ‘recognize’ [*erkennen*] but in which we thinkers are also already entangled [*verstrickt*]” (ibid.).

Ruhloff describes the task of drawing students into a *radical consideration* of validity claims and the arguments supporting them as enabling a *problematic employment of reason* (see Ruhloff, 2001). The argument in favour of helping newcomers use their reason in a problematizing way is that educative teaching under the claim of *Bildung* runs the risk of turning into a “kind of higher order dogmatism [*Dogmatismus höherer Art*]” (Ruhloff, 2006, 295) if students are not also summoned to consider the presuppositions underlying specific claims and the arguments supporting them. Consequently, educative teaching cannot be restricted to enabling students to develop a “relatively well-founded and relatively extensive knowledge and ability to judge” (Ruhloff, 1979, 182). The development of objective insights and own value judgments does not necessarily lead to a reflection on one’s presuppositions. Therefore, students should not only be introduced to knowledge and be asked to form their own value judgments; they should also be summoned to a radical consideration in which “a specific practical or theoretical claim to validity” is “put under the reservation of the questionable validity of specific presuppositions” (Ruhloff, 1996, 293). In this sense, inviting students to a problematic employment of reason means opening up spaces for newcomers to form their own judgments by questioning seemingly fixed theoretical and practical judgments with regard to their presuppositions. To put it more pointedly: Only with the “examination of the presuppositions” that underpin the claims to validity of our theoretical and practical judgments and the “thinking through of possible alternatives” to these presuppositions “do we achieve *Bildung* in the sense of intellectual independence [*gedankliche Selbständigkeit*]” (Ruhloff, 2006, 293).

Against this background, teaching would only be understood as non-affirmative if students are asked to “think and judge for themselves in a way that is critical of dogma *and* reason” (Benner & Hellekamps, 2004, 970; my emphasis). Consider a lesson in which the COVID-19 pandemic is addressed. Non-affirmative teaching in this case would not only mean helping students to gain insight into specific knowledge about the coronavirus in virology or epidemiology. Nor would it only address the controversial question of how to deal with the pandemic politically and encourage students to form their own value judgments, or be limited to confronting students with different (scientific, political, economic, moral or religious) perspectives on the issue. Rather, such teaching would also aim at summoning newcomers to reflect on the presuppositions underlying certain theoretical and practical judgments – for instance, by addressing the possibilities and limits of a virological or epidemiological perspective on the pandemic, or by confronting the egalitarian conception of justice underlying certain political decisions with a nonegalitarian one.

These considerations are based on the assumption that we always take a certain perspective on facts, and that in modern societies different perspectives have developed that cannot be put into a hierarchical order. The knowledge that children and young people acquire within educative teaching and the value judgments that they develop in this context are always related to certain perspectives. For example, to discuss an issue in terms of physics is different from asking about the history of a discovery in physics, or from assessing possible moral consequences of such a discovery. This fact would have to be addressed in educative teaching in an

age-appropriate way, so that students could recognize a certain perspective on an issue and assess the possibilities and limits of the respective perspective in relation to alternative ones. If this specific change of perspective is left out, the students would refer to issues from a certain perspective but the reference itself would remain unthematized and thus at the same time removed from the students' judgment. This would deprive children and young people of an important insight, namely, that no single perspective allows for a complete grasp of an issue. This insight might help newcomers develop, beyond the classroom itself, a certain immunity to attempts to win them over to a supposed "central perspective" and thus to undermine the polycontextuality of modern societies (see Günther, 1979).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have developed a description of non-affirmative school teaching and embedded it in a general theory of non-affirmative education. Conceptualizing school teaching as educative teaching under the claim of *Bildung* can be seen as a specific proposal with which educational science can react to the expectation of providing an educationally justified orientation framework for school development and consulting on school development.

Of course, the school is not only an educational institution, but also, and perhaps even primarily, a social problem-solving institution [*gesellschaftliche Problemlöseinstanz*] (see Klafki, 1989). This means that schools are first and foremost institutions in which teaching, studying and learning processes are made permanent, which are of fundamental importance for the transmission of culture – precisely because they impart knowledge that cannot be acquired in everyday interaction. Educative teaching is therefore based on the assumption that the introduction into knowledge, which is institutionalized in schools, does not per se contradict the idea of addressing students as subjects – at least if "the appeal to tradition does not become a substitute for the examination of claims to validity" (Heitger, 1984, 42) and thus undermine the "freedom to take a stand vis-à-vis tradition" (*ibid.*, 44).

At the same time, it should have become clear that educative teaching represents an orientation of school teaching that can by no means be regarded as realized today. Such a conception of school teaching rather fulfills the function of a guiding idea of school development and the consulting that supports it. One must take into account the fact that school development is a self-dynamic process in which consulting can play only a supporting role. To "implement" educative teaching at a given school is thus at best only possible to a limited extent. For research, therefore, the question arises as to what the preconditions, possibilities and limits of a development of an individual school are, for which educative teaching is relevant. For research, however, there is also the question of a school development consulting, which is not only directed at initiating and supporting development processes in

general, but seeks to support the development of an individual school in *specific*, namely, in *educational, respects*.

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Chapter 4

Herbart's Educative Teaching in Times of Big Data-Based Measurement and Assessment



Ling Lin

Abstract As big data-based measurement and assessment in education is expanding worldwide since the turn of the century, the relationship between the evidence-based practical culture and the Bildung process (*Geistesbildung*) of the children has continued to provoke discussion among educational scholars. This chapter then attempts to rethink the teaching-studying-learning relationship in big data-based measurement and assessment by returning to the classical didactics (*Didaktik*), namely, Herbart's theory of "educative teaching" (*erziehender Unterricht*). To a certain extent, it is the alienation of the teaching-learning relationship in the big data-based measurement and assessment that makes this classical education theorist, who is often overlooked, relevant today. To understand the non-affirmative character of educative teaching, we should return to one of Herbart's earlier concepts, namely, the "aesthetic representation of the world." With this concept, we can see that if the instruction is essentially a Bildung-oriented formation process based on the full interaction between the student and the contents of the world (*Weltinhalte*), that is, a process of expanding children's experience and horizons of Bildung (*Bildungshorizonte*). In that case, the relationship between the teacher and the student, between the teaching activity and the learning activity, will fundamentally be determined by the initiation and development of the Bildung process, rather than by numerical symbols and their representation of a particular teaching and learning result. The non-affirmativity of modern teaching-learning relationship laid down by educative teaching should not be overlooked, especially in the age of big data-based measurement and assessment.

Keywords Educative teaching · Aesthetic representation · Non-affirmativity · Bildung · Teaching-learning relationship

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© The Author(s) 2023
M. Uljens (ed.), *Non-affirmative Theory of Education and Bildung*,
Educational Governance Research 20,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30551-1_4

Introduction

The non-affirmative theory of education, which has been developed by the German education scholar Professor Dietrich Benner in Berlin, is an important theory allowing us to discuss the characteristics of modern education (*Erziehung*), Bildung and educational institutions. It suggests that the pedagogical demands in other areas of human practice (such as politics, ethics, work, religion, and art) should not be applied directly to pedagogical practice without being examined and transformed by the intrinsic logic (*Eigenlogik*) of education processes (*Erziehung* and *Bildung*). It suggests that human education practice exists in a non-hierarchical interrelationship with other human practices (cf. Benner, 2015). Although the idea of human practices as related in non-hierarchical fashion was born in German-speaking culture (cf. Benner, 1982), its use is clearly not limited to German-speaking countries. This is not only because Benner's *General Pedagogy* (*Allgemeine Pädagogik*) has been translated into multiple languages and has become a work that educational researchers in many countries are keen to read, including China. More importantly, the basic principles of modern education, Bildung and educational institutions aroused the resonance of researchers from different cultural regions, and continues to form a richer understanding of the non-affirmative theory of education. It has also developed into a platform that enables researchers in educational leadership, didactics (*Didaktik*), and curriculum studies to engage in dialogue around common central questions in these fields (cf. Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017, p. 8).

The non-affirmative theory of education is not only a bridge to discuss education-related issues in a cross-cultural way, but also a bridge that we can use to connect the pedagogical and didactical problem history (*Problemgeschichte*). In the case of didactics, for example, the non-affirmative perspective can, on the one hand, lead us to reflect on the current teaching-learning relationship in the context of the worldwide prevalence of big data-based measurement and assessment. On the other hand, the approach can lead us back to important original ideas of modern pedagogy and didactics like Herbart's "educative teaching" (*erziehender Unterricht*). This is helpful in reconsidering questions like what exactly do we want our students to achieve in the teaching-learning process, what kind of human beings we want them to become, and in order to achieve these purposes, what kind of relationship between teaching and learning should we assume?

A number of researchers have presented their views and critics on the issue of so-called culture of measurement in education and democratic education (e.g. Biesta, 2010; Jin, 2019; see contributions in part V of this volume). These arguments also inspire this chapter, but the starting point of my discussion is Herbart's theory of educative teaching. This chapter contains three main sections. The first is to answer why Herbart's theory of teaching and learning (*Unterricht*) from over 200 years ago is still important and necessary in current times. Second, what kind of non-affirmative character does *educative teaching* contain and how does it manifest its non-affirmative character? Third, what is the non-affirmative demand of educative teaching for the modern teaching-learning relationship? Finally, what does

educative teaching tell us about teaching and learning that both are monitored by big data techniques?

Is Educative Teaching Outdated? The Alienation of the Teaching-Learning Relationship in Measurement Culture Makes It Necessary Again

Why is Herbart's educative teaching theory important for the time being? A short answer is because the teaching-learning relationship in schooling is currently facing two difficulties. First, there is a double loss of subjectivity in the teaching-learning relationship as it occurs in big data-based assessment and measurement. Second, we have witnessed the loss of power of the general didactical discourse. To better confront these two difficulties, we need a theory that considers teaching-learning and pedagogical research from the standpoint of the intrinsic logic of education processes (*Erziehung and Bildung*). Herbart's *educative teaching* is clearly in line with this.

The first challenge is the double loss of subjectivity in the teaching-learning relationship. This loss occurs in the current measurement culture, where the interaction among the teacher, the student and the content (or world content in the context of Herbart's "aesthetic representation") predominantly is monitored by quantitative data. Evidence-based educational research has become a dominant force in the paradigm of pedagogical research in several countries (cf. a review in Biesta, 2010, pp. 29–31; 2017a, b), just like what has happened in China (cf. Yuan, 2017, 2019). The rise of a culture of measurement in education has led to the replacement of questions of value and democracy in education with questions of technology and management, and this replacement has led to a concern about efficiency and effectiveness of education process rather than the process itself (cf. Biesta, 2010, p. 28). This big data-based measurement and assessment in education has become a new power dominating and controlling school education and will result in a panoramic data-based surveillance over the educational process, quality and behaviour (cf. Jin, 2019). Although the affirmation and proclamation of student's subjectivity has not diminished, it is in fact, due to such data power, completely unhelpful in the solving the crux of the matter, which is that the big data-based measurement and assessment of the teaching-learning activities and didactical research have both forgotten the intrinsic logic of education and teaching-learning processes. Herbart's theory of educative teaching, as Benner clarifies, is not only one of the modern educational theories of the intrinsic logic of education processes (*Erziehung and Bildung*), but also the inspiration that led him to develop the non-affirmative theory of education (cf. Benner, 1982; or see the first part of this book).

The second difficulty is the loss of power of the general didactical discourse. This issue has different manifestations. For example, evidence-based pedagogical research began to influence the teaching-learning process, and psychological und

sociological theories replaced general didactics as a guide to the teaching-learning process and didactical studies (cf. Rucker, 2019, p. 411). Such a situation may also be called “learnification” of education, which triggered efforts to the “rediscovery of teaching” (cf. Biesta, 2017a, b, pp. 27–29; Benner, 2020, pp. 319–320). The rediscovery of teaching among a broader group of educational researchers, “opens up new and different existential possibilities for students, particularly opportunities for encountering what it means to exist in and with the world in a grown-up way – opportunities that may be precluded if we tie teaching too closely to learning” (Biesta, 2017a, b, p. 22). Again, for example, the discourse of didactics is squeezed by the discourse of curriculum and the closely related discourse of learning, as in the case of mainland China: “Curriculum studies are currently predominant in the realm of theory, with many Chinese educational policymakers and curriculum theorists considering didactical theories to be outdated or even anachronistic” (Ding, 2021, p. 207). In this regard, educative teaching shows the relationship between education (*Erziehung*), Bildung and children’s development process. If the “formative experiences” (*bildende Erfahrungen*) of students, based on the teaching-learning process, is the key indicator by which we judge the value of this process, then we can then say that this teaching and learning process is really working. In this process, the teacher exerts his influence in such a way that engages students in “formative experiences,” or in Bildung processes, centred around the contents of instruction and teaching (Benner, 2015, p. 493). This is also the value requirements demanded by the non-affirmative theory of education and a foundation for curriculum studies and didactics (Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017). Given the above arguments, there is no doubt that Herbart’s educative teaching theory is worth revisiting in the present day.

Why is Herbart’s theory of educative teaching needed? The second reason is that I have often felt Herbart’s absence in some important pedagogical and didactical works (e.g. Biesta, 2006, 2017a, b). This is by no means to say that Herbart always must be present when people talk about a certain pedagogical or didactical issue. My question is rather that, why is it that such a theorist as Herbart, who tries to find “the determination of the inherent logic of modern pedagogical action” (cf. Benner et al., 2015, p. 115) and tries to construct “the first draft of a modern Bildung-theoretical (*bildungstheoretisch*) didactics” (cf. Kron, 2000, p. 74), is so often overlooked. Is it, as Jachmann criticized more than 200 years ago, because of the “pretentious obscuration” of his language (cf. Jachmann, 1964, p. 146)? Or, is it because of his poor reputation in the eyes of most pedagogues who are currently teaching at universities (cf. Hilbert, 2011, p. 165)? However, not all education researchers have forgotten Herbart (e.g. Schwenk, 1963; Benner, 1993, 1997, 2015; Prange, 1994, 2007, 2010; Hellekamps, 1991; Anhalt, 1999). Or, perhaps, in the debate between traditional and modern pedagogy, he has been completely defeated by Dewey? Obviously, we can find answers that can be used to disprove the third doubt in the works of Benner and English (cf. Benner et al., 2015, pp. 97, 148–156; English, 2013, 2022). At least in the community of educational researchers in mainland China, the prevailing interpretation is that Herbart’s theory calls for teacher-centred, textbook-centred, and classroom-centred processes, while Dewey’s calls

for student-centred, experience-centred, and activity-centred processes (cf. Yang, 2010, pp. 98–123). Almost every university student who enters the door of pedagogy is firstly told, consciously or unconsciously, about the above so-called pedagogical common sense. If this happens in other countries and regions as well, then I think it is a major loss for modern pedagogy and didactics, that we all face.

This chapter contributes to re-establish educative teaching as an object of study when reflecting on the teaching-learning relationship in the context of the development of the empirical instruction studies. To understand educative teaching, it is considered necessary to relate to the earlier concept of “aesthetic representation of the world,” based on which we can see how the educative teaching is characterized by non-affirmativity and then clarify what kind of education and Bildung requirements it lays down for the modern teaching-learning relationship.

The Non-affirmative Characters of Educative Teaching: An Understanding Based on Herbart's Concept of “Aesthetic Representation of the World”

Faced with the “criticism” of general pedagogy and “the rediscovery of teaching,” Thomas Rucker from Bern University tries to construct non-affirmative general didactics. In his article, Rucker attempts to construct non-affirmative general didactics by proposing five aspects of a non-affirmative process of teaching and learning: artificiality (*artifizieller Charakter*), knowledge and values, multifacetedness (*Vielseitigkeit*), dialogue guidance, and its present-future meaning and paradigmatic meaning (cf. Rucker, 2019). Among these five aspects, the multifaceted nature, dialogue guidance and present-future meaning, Rucker establishes and clarifies their meaning in connection with Herbart's pedagogy.

However, Rucker does not relate to Herbart's concept of “aesthetical representation of the world” (*ästhetische Darstellung der Welt*) in 1804 to explain the educative teaching theory and its non-affirmativity. This is a concept that Herbart used to refer to the “the main work of education” (*Hauptsache der Erziehung*) prior to the publication of his *General Pedagogy*, and it encompasses Herbart's pedagogical reflections on the “whole” (*Ganz*) in his early pedagogical notes. According to Herbart, the common task of the experience (*Erfahrung*), the communication or sympathy (*Teilnehmen*) and the instruction (*Unterricht*), is to represent the world as a “whole” (cf. Herbart, 1851, p. 451). In this way, Herbart demonstrates his educational path of attempting to perfect the spiritual force of young children through their aesthetical perception (*die ästhetische Wahrnehmung*) (cf. Herbart, 1887b, p. 139). Such a kind of aesthetic perception includes both spiritual and sensory perceptions. It is like the aesthetic property conveyed by Schiller in his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, through the term “sinnlichvernünftig” (cf. Schiller, 2000, p. 42). The German word “ästhetisch” here returns to its original connotation in ancient Greek. Through this notion, Herbart tries to show that the world should be as a

whole and that the nature of human being should also be developed with his complete nature and personality in mind. It is in this sense that the interaction between the subject and the world, between the student and the contents of instruction and teaching (cf. Herbart, 1887f, p. 165), can suffice and reach what Humboldt describes as “the most universal, active and free interaction” (cf. Humboldt, 1968a, p. 283). In Herbart’s context, aesthetic always implies children’s “opportunity for self-active interaction with the world” (cf. Wißmann, 1997, p. 245).

It is between the world as a whole and the individual as a whole (or the perfection of the individual) that Herbart first identifies the common Bildung-oriented purpose of educative teaching and *Zucht*, which he calls a spiritual formation process (*Geistesbildung*) of children. The former develops children’s aesthetic and moral judgment, by expanding their daily cognitive experience and communication experience into scientific, aesthetic, sympathetic, social-public, and religious interests (cf. Herbart, 1904, p. 85). Aesthetic judgment does not refer only to children’s ability to appreciate natural or artistic beauty, but also to their way of judgment and abilities in general, that is, to “attach the predicate of excellence or reprehensibility directly and involuntarily, that is, without proof and without preference or aversion, to the objects” (cf. Herbart, 1897, p. 80). Aesthetic judgments are formed in “perfect idea” (*vollendetes Vorstellen*), and thus there are as many different objects as the aesthetic judgments; at the same time, however, aesthetic judgments do not require the actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) of their objects, as long as the object has existed (cf. Herbart, 1887d, p. 264; 1897, p. 65). As Arendt says, “only what touches, affects, one in representation, when one can no longer be affected by immediate presence ... can be judged to be right or wrong, important or irrelevant, beautiful or ugly, or something in between.” (cf. Arendt, 1992, p. 67). When students develop their one-sided interest or multifaceted but unstructured interest – a demand of facetiousness brings students only the constrain of erudite – to a structured and systematic versatility, their tests or judgment then manifest an aesthetic character, that is, the ability to make unbiased judgments. Moral judgments, on the other hand, are only aesthetic judgments made in relation to the various kinds of willpower (cf. Benner et al., 2015, pp. 106–108; Benner, 1993, pp. 146–165). The ability developed by educative teaching, which Herbart calls “insight” (*Einsicht*), is an ability that integrates cognition, perception and action. And *Zucht*, whose basic task is to provide students with “sympathy and support” (cf. Herbart, 1902, p. 173; 1904, p. 140), is to develop a will that corresponds to insight, so that they can act in a way that follows their own insight in term of teachers’ supports.

It is also by the help of the tension between the world as a whole and the individual as a whole (or the perfection of the individual) that Herbart responds to John Locke’s and Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s dilemma whether to cultivate children as the natural man or the modern citizen. Herbart argues that Rousseau’s educational program is “too expensive,” while Locke’s program relies too much on “social vulgarity.” The keywords of Rousseau’s education are “nature” and “life,” and the main task is to produce “nature-humans” (*Naturmenschen*) (cf. Herbart, 1897b, p. 81), who can break away from the degenerate world. However, *Émile*’s education is a non-institutionalized or one-to-one education, in which the educator had to

accompany the child from his birth to adulthood. However, the teacher's companion is valuable considering the high mortality rate of children at that time. On the other hand, according to Rousseau's approach, the "natural man" had, first of all, to be cultivated among the people who were deeply imbued with the society and culture of that time, after which he had to be able to return to a "society so heterogeneous," to continue his life. This whole process undoubtedly requires too much effort of the educator. The key term of Locke's educational thought is "the conventions of the society," that is, "the rules of courtesy and good society with all the varieties arising from difference of persons, times, and places, and who will then assiduously direct his pupil as suits his age to the observation of these things." (cf. Herbart, 1897b, p. 81). Education is a kind of "worldly education" (*Welt-Erziehung*), which produces "real men of the world" who will repeat the mission of the previous generation and live in the same way as the previous generation. For Herbart, Rousseau's vision of a "natural man" implies that mankind will repeat, as far as possible from the beginning, a series of evils that have already been overcome, while Locke's scheme of a "real man of the world" implies the continuation of the evils of the present society (cf. Herbart, 1887e, pp. 5–6; 1897b, pp. 78–81).

What Herbart considers is how to prevent the growing generation from being divorced from the reality of society, but also to prevent them from getting too deep in it. In other words, how can the children be led to "a better existence" (ein besseres Daseyn)? In answering this question, Herbart does not seek help from other educational thinkers, but tries to find the answer to this question in the overall process of human spiritual and intellectual development history. He observes and describes the "reality of the child as a fragment of a vast whole" in which the child is "in the full force of what one has felt, found and thought" (cf. Herbart, 1964c, p. 7), to describe and present in an aesthetic way the "picture" (*Bild*) of "what the nature man fundamentally could and should be" (cf. Herbart, 1887a, p. 12). In order to represent the world aesthetically, it is necessary for the educator to reflect on his own times, and to turn children's attention to the beginning of the historical sequence and human culture. The aim was to return to the "pure origin of the light of history," that is, to those times that were written by masters, and whose spirit was constantly drawn upon by poets. The idea was to rethink the nature and the image of the human being, to rethink the value and the inner logic of education (*Erziehung* and *Bildung*) (Herbart, 1887d, p. 265). Based on the above ideas, the management of children and educative teaching both are the preparatory activities, while *Zucht* is the supporting force that ultimately enables the growing generation to move into the public sphere.

Thus, when we engage in rethinking, in the sense of Herbart's concept of the "aesthetic representation of the world," we come to understand the non-affirmative character of his didactics: the task of teaching is to allow the children to obtain *Bildung* during the process of the many-sided, active and free interaction with the world as a whole. On the one hand, politics, art, ethics and religion are reflected in the contents of teaching and learning in a pedagogically meaningful way, that is, in a way that is appropriate for children's plasticity and his learning ability. On the other hand, the children always are involved in their "formative experiences" in the dialectical interaction between "plasticity" (*Bildsamkeit*) (cf. Herbart, 1902, p. 70)

and “self-activity” (*Selbstthätigkeit*) (cf. Herbart, 1902, pp. 145–146). As they grow into adolescents and then enter society, they will then use their formative experiences to improve the conditions in the public sphere (cf. Herbart, 1887e, pp. 118–126).

The Non-affirmative Requirements for Modern Teaching-Learning Relationship in Consideration of Educative Teaching

Based on the concept of the “aesthetic representation of the world,” we can see the non-affirmative requirements that Herbart establishes for the modern teaching-learning relationship. The process of teaching-learning consists of the teacher, the student and “the third thing,” that is, the contents of teaching and learning. In the process of educative teaching, the teacher is the demonstrator and the supporter, who opens the process of *Bildung* and the acting process of the students with “pedagogical tact” (cf. Herbart, 1887c, p. 286). The contents of teaching and learning reflect a world that consists of history and the present, the near actuality and the remote, the great whole and the fragment, the ideal and the reality (cf. Herbart, 1897b, p. 87).

For the teacher, educative teaching is the science of imparting the knowledge (cf. Herbart 1887e, p. 10; 1897b, p. 84). The imparting of multiple aspects of knowledge is only his basic task. The more central task is to develop children’s living sympathy, refined taste, true penetration and spirit of observation (cf. Herbart, 1897b, p. 104), to develop their ability of thinking, judgment and action, and enable them to acquire the foundation for ethical action (*Tugend*), that is, the insight. This spiritual formation process is fundamentally the result of the student’s own interaction with the world as a whole. However, this process could not be initiated without the teacher’s support as the children’s pre-existing knowledge is based only on daily experience, and their communication experience is based only on interaction with their family, peers and neighbours. In other words, they are all based on children’s surroundings, on the near actuality and the fragment. The teaching process is thus charged with the responsibility of expanding the children’s experience and communication or sympathy. The basic structure of this art of expansion is the “aesthetic representation” in terms of poets and historians, through growing knowledge of men (i.e., anthropology), through moral and religious discourses (cf. Herbart, 1887d, pp. 268–269; 1897a, p. 75), and to show children what does not exist in front of their eyes. The successful initiation of this process of expansion is dependent on the teacher’s pedagogical tact, that is, the teacher’s ability to make sharp judgments and decisions in an actual situation (cf. Herbart, 1887c, p. 286). Fundamentally, this is the process of expanding “*Bildung* horizons of modern man” (cf. Benner et al., 2015, p. 117).

The teacher is the presenter of the world as a whole, and the student is the active viewer of the contents presented by the teacher. Under the teacher’s “aesthetical

representation" and "show" operation (*zeigen*), the students' attention is awakened and the process of "concentration" (*Vertiefung*) and "reflection" (*Besinnung*) is thus initiated. According to the German scholar Klaus Prange, the action of showing, pointing or guiding contains a double layer of meaning. First, there is the movement that guides the subject towards the "fact" (*Sachverhalt*) and thus forms a link from the subject to the object. Second, there is simultaneously a movement from the "fact" to guidance of the subject, which forms a link from the object to the subject (cf. Prange, 2012, p. 68). This two-way relationship is similarly encompassed in the processes by which students engage in aesthetic perception or aesthetic judgment (cf. Prange, 2010, p. 20). As soon as the student begins to see the world, presented to him by the teacher, with his own eyes and perspective, he begins the process of constructing a relationship with the others, with the outside world. He is therefore a thinker, a perceiver and an appreciator as well as a viewer. As this process begins, the students will gradually become a person in action. The insight that Herbart wants his students to acquire is precisely the "the reflection of the power of judgment" (cf. Kant, 2000), which is demonstrated when the student's horizons of *Bildung* is expanded.

The contents of the world (*Weltinhalte*), that is, *what* the teacher represents, and *what* the students see, think and judge, connect the teacher's and the student's interaction in the teaching-learning process. In this, there is a connection between the reality of the world and the ideal state of the society, the present situation of the human spirit (i.e., the present state of the student) and the ideal (the re-presentation of the ideal spirit picture of modern humanity, as it had been in the ancient Greeks). This process should have aesthetic property. It encompasses all the technical and methodological aspects of teaching, and learning should always be open to the students and allow them to enter and be able to bring themselves to the interaction process with the world. This interaction should also have a formative force (*bildende Kraft*) and contain the direction and the goal of students' formation process of their spiritual and intellect. Once the student has begun to interact with the contents of the world, he or she may set himself or herself on a process of moving ever closer to the perfection (*Vollkommenheit*).

In educative teaching, as Klaus Prange has pointed out, the teacher, through certain "operations," shifts the students' attention to the contents that they have not yet mastered and that they cannot master only by themselves. These operations are the connecting bridges between the "known" and the "unknown." In this process, the children learn and act under the guide of the teacher's "operations" and gradually move towards that "middle ground," updating their previous experiences and acquiring new ones. In Herbart's context, this "operation" is, in general, what he calls an "aesthetic representation," and accordingly, children's learning is a constructive process based on their aesthetic perception and judgment. This aesthetic ability of students is neither a purely receptivity nor a purely spontaneity or self-activity, but a "creative (*produktiv*) receptivity" (cf. Prange, 2012, p. 95).

Conclusion

Now we come to the final question: What role could educative teaching play when we talk about the alienation of the teaching-learning relationship in prevailing big data-based measurement and assessment? The theory of educative teaching understands the teaching-learning relationship based on the interaction between three causalities – educative causality, formative causality (*bildende Kausalität*) and methodical causality (cf. Benner, 2020, p. 31). Such way of understanding the teaching-learning relationship can remind us how to grasp the nature and the essentiality of the teaching-learning activities and the teaching-learning relationship in the context of big data-based measurement and assessment. An important reminder of educative teaching is that the meaning of teaching occurs at the very moment when the teacher, in interaction with the students, opens up the interaction process between the students themselves and the contents of the world, that is, occurs in the spiritual formation process, through the processing of the contents of the world. The initiation and advancement of this relationship always presupposes the active participation and action of the student in the teaching process. In their interaction with the contents of the world and with the others, the students not only acquire basic knowledge, but also, and more importantly, develop their own “very mobile and active mind” (*vielgewandter und vielgeweckter Geist*) (cf. Herbart, 1887d, p. 266; 1897a, p. 67). They expand their own horizon of *Bildung*, construct their “formative experience” and virtuous experience, and develop their reflective judgement and morality. In this sense, the aim and value of the teaching-learning process in the perspective of educative teaching is not only to advance the educational aim or purpose as a whole, which all forms of educational action (i.e., children management, educative teaching and *Zucht*) need to share, but also to open up and advance the spirit formation process of the students. Such a theory of teaching and learning, based on the non-hierarchical or intrinsic logic of education process (*Erziehung* and *Bildung*), provides us an important and necessary way of understanding the nature of teaching-learning activities and their relationships in the era of big data-based educational measure and assessment.

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Chapter 5

Bildung-Centred Non-affirmative School Didactics



Michael Uljens 

Abstract This chapter contributes with a novel analysis of how non-affirmative theory of education and Bildung contribute to the development of a *second generation of school didactics* (Uljens, *School didactics and learning*. Psychology Press, Hove, 1997). Despite differences in terminology, non-affirmative general pedagogy and school didactics have similarities. First, inspired by the early reception Hegel-influenced education theorizing in Finland (J. V. Snellman, Z. J. Cleve), school didactics (SD) focus the relational teaching-studying-learning process, which resembles the constitutive principles of summoning and *Bildsamkeit*. Second, both are Bildung-centred regarding the centrality and the educative treatment of teaching contents from the learner's perspective. Third, despite one is centered on general pedagogy ('Allgemeine Pädagogik') and the other on didactics, both focus the *school* as an educative institution. Fourth, both focus how societal interests transform into and influence pedagogical interaction. Fifth, both accept a non-teleological view of societal development. Sixth, both positions accept critical citizenship (*Mündigkeit*) and democracy as central for public education. Yet, the chapter shows how the principles put forth in non-affirmative general pedagogy significantly deepens many themes in the early version of school didactics. The present version of school didactics makes a contribution by identifying three related pairs of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, and explains the transition between these by the principles of summoning to self-activity and *Bildsamkeit*. Non-affirmative SD also reminds that educational leadership is necessary for understanding school teaching.

Keywords Didaktik · School didactics · Non-affirmative education theory · Teaching-studying-learning process · Educational leadership

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M. Uljens (ed.), *Non-affirmative Theory of Education and Bildung*,
Educational Governance Research 20,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30551-1_5

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Introduction

This chapter explores how non-affirmative theory of education and *Bildung*, representing a theory of general education, may contribute to developing a non-affirmative approach to *Bildung-centred school didactics* (Uljens, 1997a).¹ This explorative analysis revisits two earlier studies.

The first study is a textbook in Swedish called ‘Allmän pedagogik’ (General pedagogy, Allgemeine Pädagogik, Uljens, 1998). It was written during a research period at Humboldt University in Berlin, 1996–1997. While it included a first discussion on the relations between school didactics and non-affirmative general education, the volume was mainly a response to the then ongoing erosion of education as an academic discipline. The discipline was increasingly described as an ‘applied field of research’ focusing, for example, learning and teaching while losing sight of understanding the individual’s growth, or *Bildung*, more broadly. To a lesser degree, education appeared as a discipline for understanding the cultural transformation in terms of a dynamics between generations and for understanding the role of education for identity formation, agency and citizenship in and for culturally and politically plural societies. More generally, my volume on general pedagogy from 1998 reflected upon what kind of theory we could or should develop within the discipline of education, in order for education to operate as a critical discipline for *Bildung* in a democratic nation state, in relation to sustainability and other global challenges. The book also was a continuation on a long-standing theoretical discussion in Finland, answering the question ‘What is education?’ In Finland, such volumes on ‘general pedagogy’ have been appearing on a steady pace every 10–20 years since middle of nineteenth century (Uljens, 2001). In that volume, I introduced Dietrich Benner’s non-affirmative theory in the Nordic countries for critical review, as a possible path for the future. To my mind Benner’s *Allgemeine Pädagogik* from 1987 conceptualized the modern heritage of education in ways that were plausible. However, despite its international potential, this way of discussing education was, and still is, very much in the margins. Today, when we observe an increasing interest in *Bildung* globally, one may expect interest for education theory that treats *Bildung* and education relationally, as argued in non-affirmative education theory.

The second study I revisit, and the main object for this chapter, is *School Didactics and Learning* (Uljens, 1997a). This study outlined a *reflexive theory of didactics*. Despite a different terminology, it is obviously reminiscent of the non-affirmative approach, making a closer dialogue inspiring. The reason for choosing the, then odd, expression of *school didactics* in favour of *general didactics* was, first, that the ‘learnification’ of society was more than obvious already 30 years ago, in the 1990s. As *general didactics* obviously did not aim at clarifying teaching and

¹Anglo-American readers understand the concept of ‘didactics’ better today than for 30 years ago, but it is still necessary to point out that German-Nordic ‘didactics’, ‘didaktik’ or ‘Didaktik’ has nothing to do with the traditional, pejorative meaning of the term ‘didactics’ in English (cf. Arnold, 2012).

learning elsewhere than in schools, it was, perhaps, not valid across different contexts. A more modest delineation appeared relevant – school didactics.

Further, the situated, everyday and contextual character of learning was very much at the fore in studies by, for example, Barbara Rogoff, Jean Lave, Lucy Suchman, John Seely Brown and many others (Rogoff & Lave, 1984; Suchman, 1987; Brown et al., 1989). Despite this contextual orientation in learning research, these approaches failed in understanding the unique character and task of the school as a site for human cognitive and moral growth, as well as a site for personality development and political citizenship education. Cultural-historical activity theorists (Engeström, 1987) and cultural psychologists (Cole, 1996) were more balanced. In addition, despite the interest in Didaktik as curriculum theory was vivid, in the 1990s theorizing didactics (Didaktik) from the perspective of *school* as an unique institution for Bildung and education had to be defended, an insight that thankfully has strengthened more recently (Masschelein & Simons, 2013; Biesta, 2019). These later developments support the idea of making school as the point of departure, as was argued in school didactics.

As we will see, despite terminological differences, school didactics and non-affirmative education theory are commensurable. One core reason to the similarities may stem from that *school didactics* was authored within, and in relation to, an education theory tradition in Finland that has the same nineteenth century roots in modern education classics (e.g. Herder, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Herbart), as has the German non-affirmative line of thought. This relatively strong Hegelian and Herbartian tradition makes Finland stand out compared with the rest of the Nordic countries (Uljens, 2022).

Accepting the *school* as the point of departure for Didaktik also allows us to organize the numerous perspectives needed for reaching a nuanced conceptualization of how compulsory public education mediate between the private and public sphere. We need to understand the school as a critical, mediating institution, between existing politics and cultural heritage and the learner's life-world. In this view, educational institutions and educational actors need a relative autonomy. They do not operate totally without outside influence, but nor are they totally subordinated to these influences.

We already observed that while the scope of school didactics is broad, it is not as broad as general didactics. As teaching and learning in modern societies occur throughout life, we expect general didactics (Allgemeine Didaktik) to be valid not only for schools but for teaching and learning regardless of where it occurs. In turn, subject matter didactics (Fachdidaktik) is to its main parts a subfield of school didactics, while some parts of subject matter didactics study the teaching and learning of subject matter in other settings than schools (Uljens & Kullenberg, 2021). School didactics emphasize the institutional perspective, including curriculum policy, governance and *Lehrplan* as objects for analysis. While school didactics did not develop as curriculum theory, Anglophone readers may well perceive of school didactics as representing curriculum theory. The approach also reminded of the administrative and organizational framing of school teaching, its governance and educational leadership. However, it did not grow out of new institutional or

organization theory. Also, taking the point of departure of the school does acknowledge the school's role in the local society, as a part of the municipal infrastructure crucial for everyday life and the student's life-world, drawing attention to the relation between education in homes and in schools. Despite such awareness, the main focus centres on conceptually answering two related pedagogical questions: How do we explain pedagogical interaction in schools? How is this interaction related to the school as a reproduction-oriented and transformational institution? School didactics was aimed for understanding teaching in political systems that recognize *ateleological globopolitanism*, that is, that the future is open and undetermined, yet in need of a global perspective, in addition to a local and nation-state one.

Yet, reaching a *pedagogical* conceptualization of the school is perhaps more difficult today than before. First, with the expansion and different research specialisations in educational research the past 50 years, attention to a more general idea of human growth (*Bildung*), including developing a personal identity and autonomy has faded. Cognitive and affective psychological perspectives on learning the subject matter have dominated research on teaching and subject matter didactics, while a *conative* interest, investigating the education of the will and volition has remained in the margins. In contrast, advocating and promoting ability for self-direction, self-determination and co-determination are core questions in both school didactics and non-affirmative general pedagogy. Second, in many places a competency-oriented curriculum policy has replaced a *Bildung*-oriented curriculum. Competency-oriented curriculum policies tend to focus generic and performative competencies that transcend specific contents, which clearly differs from a *Bildung*-centred idea of the school. Third, with an increasing number of researchers from various disciplines studying professional and everyday learning, many seek a foundation for research on teaching in psychological learning theory. However, from learning theory anything reminiscent of theory of teaching or education cannot emerge. Fourth, a global, culturally neoconservative wave has contributed to an interest for subject matter-centred teaching and learning, promoting a traditionalist idea of cultural canon. In many countries, hard core learning of the subject matter itself has become a focal point of interest, leading to losing sight of the broader *educative* task of teaching subject matter, which is central to non-affirmative theory. Fifth, new advanced digital technology and AI directs attention to new media and learning environments, strengthening an interest to ground education in communication theory. Yet, such theory is of limited use when we want to explain the educative task of schools.

From a non-affirmative school didactics perspective, it is clear that the above disparate developments in education research will not provide us with conceptual tools for dealing with major pedagogical and societal challenges of our time. To meet these needs, this chapter, as the whole volume, operates with the idea that rethinking *modern education theory* contain a potential too often overlooked in working out conceptual platforms for future. However, revisiting, rethinking and rewriting the modern heritage regarding foundational approaches to education by no means represents an uncritical or nostalgic approach (Sivesind, 2022). While we do not find the answers to today's problems and future challenges in history, we are equally lost without historical insight. This chapter assumes, following a

hermeneutic epistemology, that answers we need, develop in a collaborative and critical *contemporary* dialogue, across theoretical and cultural traditions and on a global scale.

In order to read school didactics from a non-affirmative education theory perspective, in a first step, I present some of the original features of the school didactic approach. Second, as school didactics was developed in relation to the history of Didaktik in Finland, I shortly sketch the tradition of modern Hegelian and later Herbartian education theory and Didaktik as it developed in Finland. In fact, the historical geopolitical similarities between Prussia and Finland are highly interesting in how they influenced reform of education theory. Third, I describe how empirical phenomenological research on learning and teaching contributed to the development of school didactics in the early 1990s. Already in Uljens (1997a), I discussed the influences from German Didaktik, especially Wolfgang Klafki's (1994, 1996, 1997) and Paul Heimann's approaches, why they are not touched upon here. My own connections to German Didaktik at the beginning of the 1990s developed partly in relation to the international comparative project *Didaktik meets Curriculum* as initiated by Stephan Hopmann and Kurt Riquarts (1995a, b; Westbury et al., 2000). This project brought together researchers like Wolfgang Klafki, Lee Schulman, Klaus Schaller, Peter Menck, Biörg Gudem, Pertti Kansanen, Walter Doyle, Bill Pinar, and many more (Gudem & Hopmann, 1998; Hopmann, 2015; Doyle, 2017; Kansanen, 1995; Kansanen & Uljens, 1995). Recently, Qvortrup et al. (2021) followed up on this program.

In a final step, the chapter demonstrates how school didactics apply and expand on the constitutive and regulative principles identified by Dietrich Benner. In a later chapter in this volume, related to the present one, I reflect, together with Mari Mielityinen, how the principles of summoning of self-activity and *Bildsamkeit* mediate between different forms of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. That chapter assumes that pedagogical interventions in the form of summoning of self-activity and related *Bildsamkeit* mediate transitions from one form of subjectivity and intersubjectivity to other versions of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity. Here, *Bildsamkeit* refers, on the one hand, to an anthropological assumption, and, on the other, to the subject's activity responding to summoning (Uljens, 2001, 2009; Uljens & Kullenberg, 2021).

School Didactics: Features and Influences

The introduction chapter in this volume pointed out some typical questions directing analysis in *general education* (Allgemeine Pädagogik). Which, then, are the questions a theory of *didactics* should actualize? Are they the same or different from those in general education? As we will see, both the questions and the answers overlap considerably. Here, I draw on a text-book on Didaktik that I edited in the late 1990's (Uljens, 1997b). In this volume, one of the very first Swedish translations of Wolfgang Klafki was published among texts by other German and Nordic scholars.

In the German and Nordic *Didaktik*, it is typical to start the reflection by a discussion of the traditional didactic triangle, consisting of the three poles: teacher, student and content (see e.g. Hopmann, 2007). Throughout history, we may identify a multitude of positions differently emphasizing these poles (teacher, student, contents) and how they are related. Following Hopmann (1997, p. 198ff, 2007) and Künzli (1998), this triangle combines three different, historically developed ideas of teaching. The first is the *rhetorical* tradition. The rhetorical refers to a tradition of viewing teaching as teachers' disciplined and ordered presentation of the contents (the discipline) for the student in an ordered or disciplined setting (Hopmann, 2007). Here teaching is informed by thorough knowledge of the subject matter and teacher's structured presentation of the contents.

The second source to modern *Didaktik* is the *catechetical* tradition (Hopmann, 1997). It focuses the teacher and students' communication. Positions vary according to where the main emphasis is: on the teacher's ability to lead the learning process by asking content-related questions, thus connecting the contents to learner's experience, or, on a more dynamic dialogue between the teacher and student. Also this tradition originates in a view of the contents as given, while the interaction between teacher and student is up to the teacher to decide. Compared to the previous content centred notion of teaching, in the catechetical approach students own content related activity is emphasized.

The third axis of the didactic triangle is the relation between the learner and the contents. Also this dimension refers to arranging and structuring the contents into an organized whole, in order to enhance learning. This view acknowledges the selection of contents at different levels of the school system. Teacher's selection of and preparing the students' work with the contents aim at helping the student to move beyond her present way of understanding the world, others and herself. The selected contents (*Bildungsinhalt*) should represent something exemplary, principled insight and knowledge, but its educative quality (*Bildungsgehalt*) still depends on what meaning it has for the learner's own work. Such a *Bildung*-oriented interpretation of this relation clearly gestures towards the learner's experiential engagement with the contents. Here the student's own activity, her studying, is central, aiming at a learning that reaches beyond the contents itself. The selected contents must not only be something typical, it must also make sense from the student's present and future perspective (Klafki). The contents not only serve as an object to be learned. Rather, the selected contents is a medium for educating the learner as a person (e.g. identity, will, solidarity, reflective capacity) and her more general content-related and content-transcending abilities. So, in this *Bildung*-centred tradition of *Didaktik*, teaching is not only about supporting the learner to acquire or *learn* the selected contents as such, but paying attention to in what respects the pedagogical treatment may engage the learner to develop more general capabilities and insights. In a *Bildung*-centred approach, while these general capabilities are either content-related (e.g. acquiring mathematical, historical, biological ways of reasoning as a result of studying certain occasions of these fields of knowledge) or content-transcending (critical thinking, responsibility, ability to cooperate, self-confidence, moral reasoning), these capabilities never develop as disconnected from the contents. Instead, the

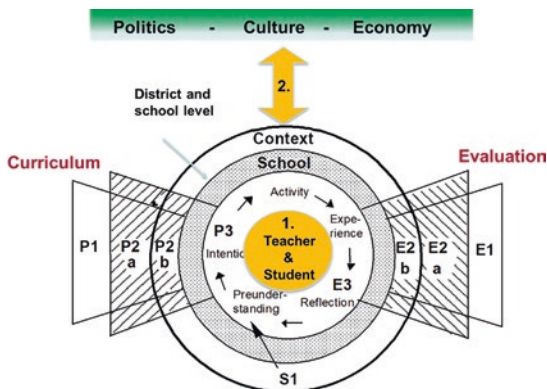
content is the necessary medium for critical socialization and education. Thus, in the *Bildung* tradition, teaching aims not only to student learning *about* the contents as such, but aims at a learning *beyond* the contents. Human educative growth (*Bildung*) is about reflective aquirement of essential features of the culture in order to develop into a coherent and self-reflective, unique individual or person, able to act autonomously out of a reflected will and discerning thought in relation to others' interests. By utilizing existing knowledge, such educative or non-affirmative teaching also aims at leading the student to the questions that the selected knowledge want to answer. Such teaching opens up for reflecting the questions behind the answers. How do we answer questions? Why are these questions important? Whose interests do they express and serve? By reaching out to the questions behind existing knowledge, teaching enables students to see that one may answer questions differently. In addition, the learner may realize that other questions are more important. In these respects, non-affirmative school didactics represents a *Bildung*-oriented view of educative teaching. I return to this further on.

In the Scandinavian literature, there is an additional, frequently occurring triangle, with the poles aims, content and method. These poles refer, respectively, to the *why*, *what* and *how* of teaching. Both this and the previous triangle appear in many different shapes in the literature. These triangles are used to identify different historically developed discourses of education, curriculum work and teaching, as we saw above. They also occur as practical schemes or tools used in teacher education to support student teachers' pedagogical thinking and practicing lesson planning. Both triangles correctly argue that theorizing starts with asking questions, and by pointing out topics to acknowledge.

We may now ask, are these triangles indeed examples of *theories* in Didaktik? A short answer is a 'no'. In fact, as we just saw, the triangle with the contents, teacher and student embraces very different schools of thought in the history of teaching. These triangles only point out certain dimensions or questions that a *theory* of teaching or Didaktik then needs to explain. The non-affirmative school didactic position agrees that these triangles successfully identify important elements and relations, but claims both of them, as such, are limited with respect to the questions raised.

In developing a complementary position, a first step in identifying the object of a theory of didactics, in one sentence, the school didactic approach identified the following questions as crucial. In teaching there is always somebody (who?) that teaches somebody else (whom?) some subject matter (what?) in some way (how?) some time (when?) somewhere (where?) for some reason (why?) towards some goal (which?) (Uljens, 1997a, p. 16). These questions cover the issues raised by both previous types of didactic triangles, focusing either on the teacher, student and the content or focusing the why, how and what of teaching. In addition to these, school didactics pointed out the context or the school as an institution.

Figure 5.1 indicates that the school didactic approach consists of four commonly accepted main components in understanding institutionalized schooling. They refer to (1) intentions, (2) realization and (3) reflection of pedagogical initiatives, at different levels, thereby acknowledging (4) the multiple contexts constituting the



- The inner part (e.g. P1, P3, E3) describe teaching as intentional non-affirmative pedagogical summoning of students self-activity (Bildsamkeit), operating through individual and shared intentions, activities, experiences and reflection around selected contents (1.), in the tension between external interests (society, curriculum, evaluation, family, culture) and the student’s life-world.
- The outer arrow (2.) indicate the non-hierarchical relations between education and other societal practices. The interests of external instances transform into practice primarily through curriculum work, organization of evaluation, leadership and management at different levels.

School = Classroom and local school as contexts

S1 = Students’ life-world including her preunderstanding, intentions and experiences (life history) in approaching the school

P1 = Curriculum planning on various *collective* levels (e.g. formulation of aims selection of contents and on state, municipality and school level)

P2 (a) = Teachers’ curriculum analysis before a pedagogical sequence in relation to the national curriculum, including teachers’ relative autonomy recognizing but not necessarily affirming external interests, thereby reminding of teacher’s moral responsibility

P2 (b) = Teachers’ curriculum analysis and planning of teaching before a pedagogical sequence in relation to the individual students/pupils, local culture and the school as context

P3 and E3= Teachers’ and students’ continuous situated and shared intentional curriculum planning, as well as their continuous situated evaluative reflection of their teaching-, studying and learning experiences given the topic or contents of instruction

E2 (b) = Teachers’ evaluation of process and results after a pedagogical sequence in relation to the individual, local culture and the school as context

E2 (a) = Teachers’ evaluation after a pedagogical sequence in relation to curriculum and evaluation on a collective level

E1 = Evaluation on a formal, collective level.

Fig. 5.1 Levels and forms of pedagogical activity according to non-affirmative school didactics. (In Uljens, 1997a)

framework for pedagogical activity in schools (especially curriculum and evaluation). The visual model thus points out the constitutive elements of pedagogical work (planning, pedagogical process and evaluation). Concerning the context, major distinctions exist between: (1) classroom (learning situation), (2) the school as an organizational context and (3) local society (culture, economy, politics) and (4) the national level, as framing the pedagogical work.

Why ‘School Didactics’?

A closer look at approaches identified as *general didactics* or *general pedagogy* demonstrate that they often limit their object of interest to the governance and practice of teaching, studying and learning in *schools*. In this light, *general didactics* and *general pedagogy* are not always very general but limited to school teaching. In such a light, *school didactics*, in fact turns out as overlapping with the scope of both general education and general didactics, but with restricted validity ambitions. For some, the notion of *school pedagogics* (German ‘Schulpädagogik’) may appear more accurate (Kansanen, 1997). In Finland, the first textbook in education by Zachris Cleve was *Features of school pedagogics*. Cleve’s (1884) book covered not only general didactics and subject matter didactics but also school leadership. It is thus revealing that the scope and object of Cleve’s (1884) school pedagogics and school didactics overlap significantly.

Like much subject didactics, school didactics also draws on a Bildung theoretical tradition, where *human growth* constitutively relates to selected cultural contents. In addition, as theory of Bildung is not limited to theorizing the individual’s growth and self-determination, but also includes questions of aims and contents regarding how we expect school to fulfil its task in an inter- or multi-generational societal and cultural perspective, also makes the concept of Bildung relevant for school didactics.

In the Nordic countries, 25 years ago it was frequent to define *didactics* (Didaktik), as a science or discipline of *teaching and learning*. To my mind, such a definition was limited as it downplays the student’s own activity. After all, teaching and studying denote human activities, while learning is something that happens with us, not anything we *do*. Thus, intentional learning activity translate to ‘studying’, which is what students do in schools. To supplement this delineation of didactics to teaching and learning, I included ‘studying’ between teaching and learning. I wanted to indicate the widely recognized view, that teaching only influences human learning indirectly, mediated by pupils’ and students’ own activity to make sense of the world, others and themselves. Consequently, school didactics was defined as the science of *teaching, studying and learning* process (T-S-L), (Uljens, 1997a).² The

²I defended *School Didactics and Learning* as my doctoral dissertation in December 10, 1995, in Finland, with Prof. Ewald Terhart (education/didactics) and Prof. Pekka Niemi (psychology) as my opponents at the public defense. Psychology Press accepted to publish the dissertation without any revisions, and released the volume in the beginning of 1997.

argument was that teaching, in the end, was about designing and organizing *study opportunities* and activities to engage pupils or students in reinterpreting something, to practice for reaching some performative competence, to find new ways of expressing artistic views or to reflect one's values and moral reasoning.³

Such a view of 'studying' as a necessary activity mediating pedagogical influence obviously reminds of Fichte's original idea of teaching as summoning the Other's self-activity (Fichte, 2000/1796). This was revealed to me in 1996–1997, when working with Prof. Dietrich Benner in Berlin at Humboldt University.⁴

In non-affirmative education theory, building upon the heritage of original philosophers like Fichte and Herbart, *Bildsamkeit* is a fundamental human feature. In the literature it refers to human plasticity or capacity to learn but in a sense where the individual simultaneously experiences the world and actively reaches out to it. *Bildsamkeit* unites the idea of the individual as originally self-active and able to learn from experience. Teaching is then a pedagogical intervention in the subject's self-directed activity to operate *in* the world and *with* the world, to make sense of it, others and herself.

By seeing individuation and socialization as two sides of the subject's growth into a moral and cultural subject, a societal citizen, and member of humanity, school didactics support what Wolfgang Klafki for his part called a 'categorical' theory of *Bildung*, uniting a so-called material and formal view of *Bildung*.⁵ In this view, human growth in pedagogical processes presuppose student's engagement with the subject matter as structured by the teacher, but in a way that aim at developing the learner's (cap)abilities and the student as a morally reasoning social and cultural being. In this view, the learner's personal identity and role as a political citizen, ability to act and live with others, given an open future, is crucial.

School didactics identifies teaching, studying and learning in schools in the tension between political, economic, cultural, societal, institutional, private and administrative interests and practices, some of which directly and indirectly influence schools' work. Expressing the position in the terminology of non-affirmative education theory, the relation between such framing practices and the school is non-linear or non-hierarchical. This means that schools stand in a dynamic relation to these practices, neither being super- or subordinate to politics. Already the first true holder of the professor's chair in Finland, Z. J. Cleve (1884), strongly recommended

³At the time, I was not aware of Fichte's view of teaching as summoning to self-activity.

⁴Professor Dietrich Benner visited Åbo Akademi University in Vasa, Finland, for the first time in May 1996, as keynote speaker at a symposium on European education. Among the other participants were Prof. Dieter Lenzen, then professor at Freie Universität, and Prof. em. Wolfgang Klafki from Marburg. In 2011, Benner became Honorary Doctor at Åbo Akademi University in Finland.

⁵The professor of education in Finland, J. J. F. Perander (1883), recognized Rousseau's and Herbart's contribution in turning education away from 'dogmatic education' and its aim to pass on the cultural heritage to the growing generation. Instead, the aim was, in Perander's interpretation, to develop the learner's general, and thereby human capabilities. To educate towards a 'plurality of interest' (Herbart) made the subject prepared for a multitude of future possibilities. Self-development and development of the learner's capacities, especially will and character, should guide the selection and treatment of the contents.

politicians not to interfere with education, but to respect the school's autonomy. In this respect, in a democracy, it is not appropriate that politics turn education into an instrument for narrow-minded and instrumental promotion of disparate interests. As schools in any case are politically directed, political democracies themselves, at the same time, always to some extent reserve pedagogical degrees of freedom for the schools. 'Political Bildung' as the promotion of the subject's ability to reflect critically, and participate and contribute to political life in plural societies (citizenship education), is obviously a central task for schools in political democracies and liberal economies.

Finally, traditional models of didactics seldom explore how various leadership or governing practices contribute to transforming societal interests into pedagogical practice. While didactics typically does recognize the curriculum as a policy document, the curriculum-governing and leadership practices themselves typically remain invisible for didactics (Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017). Although the curriculum as a policy document, including its evolution and implementation, belong to the core questions of didactics and curriculum theory, in Didaktik leadership is rarely considered to mediate collective interests. The school didactic approach consider it relevant not to disregard how educational leadership operate in mediating curricular policies and assessment that regulate teachers' degrees of freedom. Omitting educational leadership makes it difficult to grasp both how societal interests turn into pedagogical practice and how school development operate (Uljens, 2015). As school didactics intend to conceptualize teaching in schools comprehensively, it included school leadership and governance, at different levels, as necessary for understanding teaching (Uljens, 1997a, p. 86).⁶ Here *educational leadership* covers a wide sphere of knowledge fields that varies depending on the level of administration. However, at and between any levels, *pedagogical dimensions of educational leadership* is a core task (Uljens, 2015; Elo & Uljens, 2022).

The Modern Education Theory Heritage in Finland

Given that the school didactic approach was developed both in relation to a Finnish, Nordic and German frame of reference, it is revealing to observe how historical similarities between the 19th century developments of Finnish and German theorizing in education and Didaktik. Understanding similarities regarding these

⁶The opposite is also true. Educational leadership models very often are educationally mute (Uljens, 2015). Educational leadership research seldom provide a language for *what* is led, i.e. pedagogical activity. In cases when teaching and instruction is present, leadership models often lack an idea of the societal role of the school. Again, when such an idea exists, it is often prescriptive, explaining how school leaders most efficiently could affirm existing policies, or contribute to the transformation of society, according to ideals presented. In addition, educational leadership research seldom explore the *pedagogical* dimensions of leadership practice itself, including both supporting professional growth of individual teachers and developing the operational culture of the entire school.

early developments help us to understand the contemporary dialogue. While the school didactic position itself was not founded in a historical or philosophical analysis of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, nor developed in relation to non-affirmative education theory, in retrospect we can see how the early Hegelian tradition of theorizing education in Finland operate as a historical frame of reference for school didactics and its way of understanding the teaching-studying-learning process. The key connection point goes back to Fichte's famous critique of Kant's transcendental idealism. Whereas Kant defended the view that experiential phenomena depend on a priori categories and insight in moral laws, Fichte decentered the individual's autonomy and supreme role by emphasizing the distinction between I and not-I (Ich-Nicht-Ich) (Breazeale & Rockmore, 1996). Such a dualism makes awareness dependent of, but not determined by, the experienced object, while the meaning of this object depends on awareness, but is not totally determined by it. By a kind of dynamic relationalism, Fichte decenters Kantian idealism that overemphasize the subject, but without falling into materialism. Rather, for Fichte self-consciousness is a social phenomenon by assuming that the individual's consciousness of herself as culturally free depends on others summoning or calling of the self to make use of her potentiality, or in other words, education.

After the Hegelian period 1830–1880 in Finland, the Hegelian legacy (Väyrynen, 1992) no longer operated as an explicit point of reference for theory development in education in Finland, until its indirect revival in terms of new generations of Vygotsky-inspired cultural-historical activity theory in the 1980s (Engeström, 1987, 2016). However, as cultural-historical activity theory ultimately drew on Marxist dialectical materialism, A. A. Laurell's, J. V. Snellman's or Z. J. Cleve's 19th century Hegel-inspired ways of conceptualizing education were not at the fore in these activity theory developments in Finland (Snellman, 1898; Miettinen & Virkkunen, 2021). When the school didactic position developed in the mid-1990s, I was myself not well enough oriented in the Hegelian 19th century heritage in Finland. Thus, it was through my reading of the German education history that the relevance of the tradition in Finland became visible.

There were obvious cultural and political reasons to why Hegelian philosophy was well received in Finland during the nineteenth century. Finland separated from Sweden in 1809 as a result from the Napoleonic wars, and turned into a Grand Duchy in the Russian Empire (Manninen et al., 2021). Despite the incorporation, Finland remained relatively independent, with its own legislation from the Swedish era, a senate of its own and a Lutheran church. This unanticipated 'existence in between' the Swedish reign and the Russian Empire, together with influences from Herder and Hegel, offered intellectuals of the time an unprecedented need and possibility for reconstructing a new the idea of humanity, the state, the nation and the individual, as connected to each other by the notion of *Bildung*. The situation reminded very much of Prussia after the peace in Tilsit in 1807. Johan Vilhelm Snellman (1806–1881) is the name of the philosopher and later statesman (senator) in Finland that played a key role in this codification process. Snellman's theory of the state and education, as evolving from the 1840s and onwards (Väyrynen, 1992; Uljens, 2007; Kallio, 2017), demonstrate obvious similarities both with the core

idea of Herder's concept of *Bildung* and central ideas of non-affirmative education theory, as developed by the German classics (Immonen, 2021). This, together with Herbartian pedagogy that developed in Finland from the 1870s and onwards for many decades, contributed to laying a foundation for a contemporary reception of non-affirmative education theory. Thus, contemporary non-affirmative theory connects to the modern education tradition in reminiscent ways in Germany and Finland.

This modern tradition of education in Finland, in the shape of Hegelianism, dates back to the first half of the nineteenth century through the work of Johan Jacob Tengström (1787–1858), who introduced Hegel in Finland. Later on, Johan Vilhelm Snellman, Johan Jakob Perander and Zachris Cleve, all holders of the first chair of education ('chair professor of pedagogics and didactics') established in 1852, contributed to Hegelian philosophy and education theory between 1840 and 1880 (Väyrynen, 1992).

This Hegelian legacy views *Bildung* in relation to both an individual and a generational dimension of the concept. For Snellman, the purpose of *Bildung* in an individual perspective is about moving beyond traditional socialisation, by appropriating culture in a reflective and questioning way. Thus, *Bildung* aims at a reflective and historical awareness, becoming able to continuously reassess one's experiences and the world (Uljens, 2007). In a generational perspective, Snellman had the view that *Bildung* starts with learning what previous generations have achieved (*memory knowledge*), while reaching *conceptual knowledge* involves evaluation of 'traditional' knowing, and its relevance for contemporary conditions. In turn, *productive knowing* refers to the ability to think beyond what is known – it is about invention of something new. Snellman writes that the ways in which a new generation receives the tradition does not necessarily correspond with how it is passed on to the next generation. Although each generation may overcome and move beyond previous knowledge or a way of life, to view cultural change *as development* meant, for Snellman, that we ourselves interpret change *as development*. As such, in history, there exists no inherent objectives or ends. Like Herder, Snellman does not think history has any purpose beyond what humans make out of the future. In this tradition, *Bildung* denotes a constant *becoming* on both individual and cultural level. It is an unending process and task. As noted, this becoming does not have any given end it would aim at. Rather, for Snellman, the forming of an end or aim is a part of the process itself (Uljens, 2007). Laurell (1831) had developed similar views earlier.

While Snellman was the philosopher and statesman, he also held the professor's chair in education during the spring term in 1861 in Helsinki. Zachris Cleve, also Hegelian, was the second holder of the first professor chair of 'pedagogics and didactics', established in 1852 at Imperial Alexander University in Helsinki. After having held the chair for more than 20 years, Cleve published a significant textbook, *Foundations of school pedagogics* in Swedish ('Grunddrag till skolpedagogik') in 1884. In this volume, he coherently deals with general didactics, subject didactics, curriculum, school organization and leadership. Emphasizing the autonomy of schools, Cleve clearly reminds of not subordinating the school to family interests, to

political or civic interests nor to the church.⁷ This early textbook exemplifies the previously described non-hierarchical approach to understand Bildung, from the perspective of the individual and society. It is worth observing, given today's differentiated education research, that didactics and school governance is included in one and the same volume on school pedagogics (Ge. Schulpädagogik). School didactics in this chapter obviously is reminiscent of Cleve's delineation of school pedagogics as a subfield of general pedagogics or education as a discipline.

The connection to German philosophy in Finland continued after the original hegelian period by turning to Herbart, theoretically introduced by Rein (1876), professor in philosophy in Helsinki. Rein interpreted Herbart to represent a version of determinism, downplaying free will. However, Perander (1883) as professor in education, modified this determinist interpretation. Perander clearly understood Herbart's critique of Kant's a priori categories of time and space. Perander also argued that Herbart denied education as being about developing predispositions in the form of faculties that would have an existence of their own. The denial of native structuring categories of the mind was, however, not to be interpreted as if Herbart would represent determinism, Perander argued. Instead, following Pestalozzi, Herbart assumed the existence of an active subject, experiencing and operating the world in the form of apperceptions. Therefore, Perander argued, teachers' task was to summon the learner by pointing at connections between the content as experienced, already existing within the mind of the learner, and the new teaching content.

The reception of Herbart's ideas in Finland also was aware of *Bildsamkeit*, and that summoning the learner's self-activity had an educative intention to it. The development of will and moral character were the most important aims of education. Cruikshank (2022) argues the concept of *Bildsamkeit* and the idea of education a reflected will was not emphasized in the US reception of Herbart, which was the situation in Finland. Instead, Ziller's idea of curriculum as a recapitulation of cultural-historical epochs obviously received attention in the USA (Kliebard, 2016). This curricular principle of 'recapitulation' is not visible in the Herbart reception in Finland. A little later, the education professor Waldemar Ruin (1887) continued the Herbartian track by analysing the 'didactical aids for educating human character', which obviously referred to educative teaching, thereby emphasizing both experiential knowledge and the moral dimensions of, and interest in, participating in social and cultural practice. In turn, Mikael Johnsson (after 1906 Mikael Soininen, 1860–1924), wrote a widely read volume that he characterized as an 'introduction to the Herbart-Zillerian approach'. Johnsson's volume from 1895, entitled *General Education*, focused the three core notions in Herbart's *Didaktik: Regierung, Unterricht* and *Zucht* (Sw. *regering, undervisning, tukt*) (Johnson, 1895; Soininen, 1911). In two later volumes in didactics, published 1901 and 1906, Johnsson/Soininen connected these general principles of education to curriculum work and

⁷ Cleve also contributed to establishing the National Board of Education, and initiated a journal for education (*Tidskrift Utgifven av Pedagogiska föreningen i Finland*, Cleve, 1865). For an excellent overview of the development of philosophy in Finland, describing Hegelianism, between 1809 and 1917, see Manninen et al. (2021).

teaching in schools. Here, he shortly discussed steps in the teaching process (preparation, presentation, association, generalization and application) as connected to the principle of *Bildsamkeit*. The aim of education was to awaken and support the learner's interest in the subjects and to develop the learner's will (Uljens, 2001). In the present treatment of school didactics, the connections to Herbart's distinction between social order, teaching and supervision (*Regierung, Unterricht and Zucht*) is only touched upon indirectly.

During the twentieth century in Finland, influences from Herbartianism continued within teacher education until WWII through Mikael Soininen's textbooks. Phenomenological and philosophical research by Juho Hollo during the first half of the twentieth century supported this approach (Stormbom, 1986). In addition, Matti Sainio's studies on Buber in the 1950s and on Herbart's conception of religion in the 1960s continued the connections to German educational philosophy, but otherwise education research in Finland had started turning empirical from the 1920s and onwards. Albert Lilius took the first steps in this direction in the 1920's. Matti Koskenniemi's dissertation from 1936 on the social relations in the classroom, his studies on intelligence and his later project on 'didactic process analysis' (DPA) in the period 1960–1970 exemplified a kind of educational empiricism, with clear influences from *Tatsachenforschung* as promoted by Peter Petersen, whom Koskenniemi visited in Jena 1939 (Mäkinen, 2016). Koskenniemi's textbooks on didactics, criticizing the individualism he saw Herbart's pedagogy resulting in, became influential in the post-war period until the 1970s (Koskenniemi, 1971). With the turn towards English-speaking education research at the end of the 1950s, behaviourism and empirical quantitative methods received attention from the 1960s and onwards. Despite a radical expansion of the discipline from the 1970s, with the movement of all teacher education for comprehensive school teachers (*Volksschule*) to Faculties of Education at the universities in 1974, connections to German *Didaktik* were almost totally lost, but were revitalized in the 1980s and the 1990s by Pertti Kansanen, Pauli Siljander and others (e.g. Siljander, 2012; Kansanen & Uljens, 1995). However, until introduced by Uljens (1998), Dietrich Benner's *general theory of education* remained unknown in the Nordic countries. Since then, the position has received growing attention (e.g. von Oettingen, 2006; Kivelä, 2004; Siljander et al., 2012; Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017; Elo & Uljens, 2022).

Phenomenological Research in Teaching and Learning

In addition to the historical framing described above, school didactics drew on four lines of thought in the beginning of the 1990s. The first source was Ference Marton's empirical-phenomenological research approach 'phenomenography' that was later developed into 'variation theory' (Marton, 2015). Phenomenography's empirical research interest was to describe the qualitative variation in student's conceptions of the teaching content (Marton, 1981; Uljens, 1989, 1992; Marton & Booth, 1997; Ling Lo, 2012). The second source inspiring school didactics was Ulf P. Lundgren's

curriculum research and *frame factor theory* (Lundgren, 1989). The third influence was Pertti Kansanen's (1991) studies in didactics and teachers' pedagogical thinking, and the fourth, Wolfgang Klafki's critical-constructive didactics and Paul Heimann's approach.⁸ Of these, I will comment on the *phenomenographic* approach, because of its centrality in school didactics, and because it obviously gestures towards a *Bildung*-centred view on school teaching.

Between 1987 and 1992, I spent 3 years in Gothenburg, Sweden, working with Prof. Ference Marton and his colleagues on 'phenomenography' (Marton, 1981; Marton & Booth, 1997; Entwistle & Marton, 1994; Uljens, 1989, 1992). Starting in the 1970s, phenomenography became an influential approach in the qualitative research methods movement in education. This research program intended to 'describe the qualitative variation in how people conceive of their surrounding world' (Marton, 1981). Marton argued vividly for understanding human learning as a *qualitative shift* in the learner's way of understanding some phenomenon, thereby focusing the *contents* of learning rather than the process, studied by the cognitivists. In phenomenography, learning as a qualitative shift was remotely comparable with radical schema restructuring or scientific revolutions, like moving from a geocentric to a heliocentric view of the world. Phenomenography thus avoided the pitfalls of such versions of constructivism, which overemphasizes the learner's own activity and downplays content and the teacher's role. The approach also avoided the dilemmas of 'direct instruction', that overemphasizes teachers' role and downplays student's activity. Rather, phenomenography argued that teaching was about contrasting different conceptions, by identifying similarities and differences in the 'object of learning'. Thus, the teacher summoned the student's own experience by asking her to describe how they understood some phenomenon, for example, the different phases of the moon. Not only started the learners to grasp how they themselves understood something, but they also realized that the same phenomenon was understood in a number of different ways. Phenomenography was inspired by Gestalt psychology and reminded of the approach developed by Martin Wagenschein but did never systematically relate to different versions of German *Didaktik* (Wagenschein & Horton-Krüger, 1999). Today phenomenography is well known around the world. In phenomenographic teaching, an educative effect in itself is that learners realize how differently one occurrence, topic or phenomenon appear for the various participants in a class. Extending this didactic principle of teaching as *pointing* at contrasting conceptions, it included the view that a constitutive feature of teaching in different school subjects need to highlight the same phenomenon from various perspectives (Marton, 2015).

The phenomenographic position stood in stark opposition with constructivist learning theory that tried to identify those learning and information processing strategies that successful learners were assumed to apply in learning. Instead, the act of cognition (how) and its object (what) were integrated parts in a process of *Bildung*.

⁸ Wolfgang Klafki visited Finland twice. Both visits were to Åbo Akademi in Vaasa. The first time in 1994 and the second, and last time, in 1997 (Klafki, 1995; Uljens, 1997a).

By focusing learning as a change in how the contents was conceived of, the phenomenographic approach, and later variation theory, offered a rather straightforward and fruitful new opening in the 1980s for doing empirical research in subject didactics (German: Fachdidaktik). The most important principle of teaching following from this approach was to carefully find out the different ways the students understood the world, and then to turn the learner's gaze and attention to similarities and differences between conceptions and to crucial aspects of the phenomenon (Marton, 2015; Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton & Tsui, 2004).

The idea of teaching in this the research program was as simple as strong: to begin by pointing at the empirical variation in how a group of people conceived of a phenomenon, and then to challenge the student's original way of understanding. This pedagogical approach to teaching also reminds of Fichte's (1796) own example of teaching as summoning: to provide the learners with material combined with presenting a problem to solve, by own activity. It also echoes Herbart's theory of pedagogically working with apperceptions. In phenomenography, the teacher's task was to pay careful attention to the students' previous conceptions, ways of seeing or in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. In classroom learning, 'the object of learning' or 'knowledge object' was always the point of departure. Learning had occurred when the learner had changed her way of understanding from one conception to another and was able to identify other aspects of a phenomenon (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 142).

From the phenomenographic approach, school didactics adopted this phenomenological perspective on student learning in terms of changes in how the content was experienced. Teaching was always teaching of *something* and learning was about actively being operant on one's experience of this something, the knowledge object.

However, phenomenography applied a decontextualizing strategy in its research on conceptions. In this research program, the conceptions identified were not systematically related to the actual individuals, their history, the tradition, culture or the wider context. In contrast, school didactics wanted to remind of a hermeneutical approach to research on subject's conceptions of learning objects (Uljens, 1992). Empirical research indicated that, for example, children's understanding of *how* learning occurred not only varied with *what* they learned but also *where* this learning occurred (Mertaniemi & Uljens, 1994). Only through such a hermeneutic take, it was argued, phenomenology may open up for meaningful *pedagogical* studies of student's conceptions. From a school didactic perspective, phenomenography was weak with regards to a theoretically explaining teaching, from both a pedagogical-interactive and societal-political vantage point. In addition, the approach limited its interest into studying learning the contents as such, but did not reflect very much on how this learning was *educative* in the sense argued by Bildung theory, that is, how teaching was able to develop general capabilities or how schooling prepared for a broader notion of citizenship.

In addition, school didactics emphasized more both curriculum work and evaluation, at different levels (Uljens, 1997a, p. 86). School didactics also redefined the object of didactics from research on teaching and learning, to the science of

teaching-studying-learning process (Uljens, 1997a, p. 34f). To include ‘studying’, obviously made more sense, also from a phenomenographic point of view: teaching had to, if not start from, at least take seriously the teacher’s learning about the student’s way of seeing the world. Teaching and studying were considered notions describing human *activities*, whereas *learning* was a concept denoting a *process*, or something that *may* happen with humans when engaged in studying, problem-solving or just acting in the world. To see learning as a process or to see it as an activity reflect different ways to define Bildung (Lenzen, 1997), something we return to later on.

Non-affirmative Education Theory

In order to explore in more detail how Dietrich Benner’s understanding of general pedagogy is applied in school didactics, some features of non-affirmative theory need to be pointed out. Sharing Benner’s point of departure, this chapter argues we need to answer two broad questions when aiming at understanding teaching, studying and learning in schools, framed by educational leadership and curriculum work (Uljens, 1997a; Uljens, 2015; Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017). The first question is how we explain *pedagogical interaction*. The second question is how we define the relation between public *education and other societal practices*. In Dietrich Benner’s approach to non-affirmative theory, two constitutive principles help to clarify the first question (pedagogical interaction), while two regulative principles clarify the second question (education and society, see Fig. 5.2). In this section, I first describe

	<i>Constitutive basic concepts of the individual dimension</i>	<i>Regulative basic concepts of the social dimension</i>
A <i>Theories of education (Erziehung)</i>	(2) Summoning to self-activity (<i>Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit</i>)	(3) Pedagogical transformation of societal influences and requirements
B <i>Theories of Bildung</i>	(1) <i>Bildsamkeit</i> as humans being destined to receptive and spontaneous corporeity, freedom, historicity and linguisticity	(4) Non-hierarchical order of cultural and societal practices
C <i>Theories of educational institutions and institutional reform</i>		

Fig. 5.2 Two constitutive and two regulative principles organising four basic concepts as related to theory of education and theory of Bildung (Erziehungs- und Bildungstheorien). (based on Dietrich Benner, Chap. 2, this volume)

these principles shortly and then discuss how these four principles apply with respect to the school didactic position. In doing so, I point at the strength of this approach compared with some other theories.

We will now read Fig. 5.2 ‘backwards’, starting from the corner below to the right (Principle 4). This regulative principle (4) concerns how we theoretically define the relation between education and other societal forms of practice including politics, culture and economics. This regulative principle argues that modern societies, in contrast to pre-modern ones, feature a non-hierarchical relation between different forms of societal practice. It means that they all influence each other, while also being influenced by each other. Interchanging, they are super- and subordinate to each other. For example, while politics decides about new laws, these laws regulate political practice itself. Education obviously operates under the influence of many societal practices, while simultaneously preparing the individual for participation in all of them. Obviously, any political system heavily influences how it organizes its education, yet all political systems are very dependent on how education prepares new generations for the system in question. As Benner reminds, this principle of societal practices, standing in a non-hierarchical relation to each other, is strictly taken not a pedagogical principle but rather describes how a modern, liberal, society operates, in principle.

The second regulative principle (Principle 3) asks how curriculum, administration, and other forms of governance and leadership contribute to transforming societal interests to pedagogical work. Parts of Didaktik, curriculum, leadership and policy research explicitly focus this principle, by studying how politics and other societal practices do influence education, and how professionals at lower levels enact policies. In political democracies, a central question in curriculum construction and implementation is how education should prepare for autonomous participation in future political, economic and cultural life. This principle reminds us that the transformation of societal interests should guarantee educational degrees of freedom for individual schools and teachers in order not to violate such pedagogical activity that recognize their own role in the learning process. The more teachers are expected to affirm given policies, the less space there is for critical and student-centred pedagogical treatment of aims and contents.

The third position (Principle 3) explains what pedagogical activity is about – educative teaching as summoning of self-activity – but it does so in relation to notion of *Bildsamkeit* (Principle 1). The principle of non-affirmative summoning to self-activity, indicate that pedagogical activity is about recognizing the Other, her reality, potentiality and interests, yet *summoning* the learner as a self-active subject, by inviting the learner to engage in activities that for the learner creates a reflective distance to her previous experiences. Affirmative teaching either aim at conservative transmission or reproduction of existing orders, or at transformative change, led by some predefined educational ideal. In contrast, non-affirmative teaching views education as operating in an emancipatory fashion, embracing the idea of negative freedom, that is, teaching as promoting learner’s freedom from something, which means to open up the world of knowledge for the learner, yet without intention to get the learner to unreflectively adopt some other predefined ways of relating to the world.

It is well-known that mere participation in social practice does not necessarily contain the keys to conceptually grasp the principles operating in this practice. In contrast, conceptual teaching when related to practice contain such keys. Conceptual teaching that makes use of principled knowledge to explain or understand existing practice or empirical observations, is educative to the extent it contributes to the learner's ability to reflect on how given theory relate to practice. For this reason, school teaching operate by dealing with selected, exemplary or representative contents that has wider validity. The aim is to help the learner to understand that the selected contents is just an example of something more general. Non-affirmative teaching then means to accept that teaching can only result in learning when teaching is mediated by the learner's own discerning activity. Instead of equalizing the contents of teaching with the only aim of learning, non-affirmative education views the content also as the medium and method of teaching.

The 'modern' principle of teaching as *summoning* refers indirectly to political and moral liberalism of the eighteenth century, as advocated, among others, already by John Locke. Locke's liberalism accepted the individual as not determined by birth or social class. Such liberalism is closely related with a non-teleological view of history and societal development, where the future was open and unknown. Locke thus disagreed with the Augustine Christian doctrine of the original sin. The dilemma that liberalism raised for education pointed at two different directions. On the one hand, given the new view of the subject's radical freedom, education appeared to have all the power mould the subject according to own interests. On the other hand, this view of the individual as free or indetermined also raised the question if pedagogical influencing was possible in the first place? According to this interpretation, the student seemed to have the last word in deciding how external influences were to be received. The question was, how could the tension be settled between these two options? Was a choice between these two the only alternative, or was there a third option?

The principles of summoning to self-activity and *Bildsamkeit* as promoted by Fichte and Herbart offered the means to find a path beyond viewing education either as omnipotent, or education as totally powerless. These principles make up an argument that views education as something necessary, without disregarding the learner's constitutive role. Differently expressed, these principles make education not only possible, but also demonstrate its necessity. On the one hand, although subjected to a world that the human being was unable to escape, education was made possible by human anthropological freedom. On the other hand, education was necessary for the individual's becoming a culturally autonomous and self-determined subject, sharing culture with others, identifying herself in relation to it, but with capacity to move beyond it. Although education for these reasons was necessary, it could still not determine the subject, due to the subject's anthropologically given freedom. In this way, the subject was dependent of education to reach cultural self-determination, but the possibilities to influence the subject was dependent on the capacity to learn and the subject's own activity – *Bildsamkeit*. Herbart's central contribution was to introduce the idea of *pedagogical causality* to overcome the antinomy between freedom and coercion, between the causality of nature and the

causality of freedom. The concepts *Bildsamkeit* and *summons to self-activity* thus received a bridging function for Herbart (Siljander, 2008, pp. 74–76).

The final principle (1) is named with the German word ‘*Bildsamkeit*’ (Swedish ‘*bildbarhet*’, Finnish ‘*sivistettävyy*s’). If Principle 4 (non-hierarchical relation between societal practices) describes an assumption regarding how societal practices are related, namely, in a non-hierarchical way, Principle 1, *Bildsamkeit*, instead describes the individual’s relational and dynamic interdependence between the subject and object. This interdependence is one of the core issues in the philosophy of mind and epistemology. Here it must suffice to say that this view of *Bildsamkeit* reminds of Gurwitsch’s (1982) phenomenology of awareness as a noetico-noematic correlation emphasizing the relation between ‘the object *which* is intended’ and ‘the objected *as* intended’ (Uljens, 1992, pp. 66–69), which is a position close to phenomenographic non-dualist ontology, focusing the ‘object as experienced’.

Some might want to compare *Bildsamkeit* with human ability or capacity to learn, but although *Bildsamkeit* reflects human plasticity and ability to adapt to new circumstances, *Bildsamkeit* does not refer, in a limited sense, to an internal or immanent human capacity as thought of in most learning psychology. Rather, *Bildsamkeit* is a relational concept denoting subject-world relations, experiential in nature.

It is, hopefully, now clearer how the principles 2 and 3, in Fig. 5.2, describe *pedagogical* orientations, initiatives and interventions. Principle 2 refers to the pedagogue or teacher who acts in *interpersonal* relations aiming at supporting someone’s activity to reach insight or develop her ability. Principle 3 asks about the intentions and practices at a *collective* level that transform or contribute to transform, societal interests into pedagogical activity, thereby framing concrete teaching. The issue raised by this principle is to what extent these external influences force teachers to affirm them. The normative aspect of Principle 3 says that external interest should not be transformed in ways that endanger teachers possibilities to pedagogically question external interests and validity of existing knowledge, as only such pedagogical freedom for teachers allow students to themselves work with the teaching contents in creative ways and independently reflect on the meaningfulness of how given knowledge answers the questions it intends. These principles, 2 and 3, expressing pedagogical intentional interventions on a collective and an individual level, constitute what Benner calls ‘theory of teaching and education’ (*Theorie der Erziehung*).

Likewise, in this tradition of general pedagogy, theory of *Bildung* refers to two different but open and dynamic processes that form necessary prerequisites for understanding pedagogical intervention in modern societies. First, on an individual level (1), *Bildsamkeit* describes the individual learner’s self-active and dynamic subject-world relation. Second, on a collective level (4), theory of *Bildung* refers to the open dynamics and non-hierarchical relations between different societal and cultural practices.

A Non-affirmative Interpretation of School Didactics

In this section, I will discuss how the principles of non-affirmative education theory apply in school didactics.

In the history of educational theory, we can identify various models of how to relate education to societal interests and development. Variations of at least the following two positions are typical. First, a pre-modern way of thinking understands education as being located *within* the existing society or culture. This socialization-oriented model of education emphasizes that the task of education is to prepare the individual for the already *existing* society and culture. In this model, societal practices and norms function as the guiding principles. Education is then subordinate to societal practices. In this view, education itself is not used to transform or develop society, instead the school follows the development of an existing society, and is primarily oriented to prepare individuals for it. Today, versions of sociocultural apprenticeship-oriented learning research broadly follows this line of thought.

Second, in contrast to the conservative reproduction-oriented model, we are familiar with the idea of education as a revolutionary or transforming force with respect to human development or societal practices. In its radical forms, transformation-oriented education not only defends education's emancipatory task, but also positions itself as superordinate with respect to societal interests. Instead, education should develop something that does not yet exist, that is, to work towards ideals, which, in the future, may become real as a new generation enters society after having received education. In this model, education is superordinate with respect to societal interests.

Both the reproduction and the transformation model are heavily normative. They are not primarily concerned with developing the individuals' ability to *autonomous reflection (Mündigkeit)*, which includes ability to make informed decisions regarding what is valuable. Strictly taken, these models run the risk of turning education, curriculum work, and teaching into indoctrination utilizing technological or instrumental activities where results relate to values external to the profession and practice. Some would even consider these models running the risk of violating the concept of democracy, as they subordinate education to political ideologies too directly. Compared with these positions, school didactics accept the critique of socialization and transformation-oriented ideologies, defending the non-affirmative position. Visually, school didactics communicated this by reminding that teachers' planning of their teaching (P2) do not necessarily totally fall within curriculum policy at the national level (P1). It was reminded that teachers need to have this freedom to avoid an affirmative and instrumental view of teaching.

The non-affirmative position has occurred in various shapes throughout history. Rousseau, for his part, argued for a position between socialization and transformation-oriented pedagogy with his concept of 'negative education'. Rousseau, in his famous foreword in 1762 argued that if some existing social condition is not acceptable, there is not much idea to prepare the growing generation into such a society. Education would then only reproduce unfavourable constellations. Consequently, Rousseau advocates an idea of *negative education* promoting the idea of *negative*

liberty. Negative education is not the absence of educational influence, rather negative education wants to avoid the previously described affirmative positions.

We may describe non-affirmative school didactics by a distinction between negative and positive liberty, central in political philosophy and in social philosophy (Berlin, 1969). Broadly speaking, while negative liberty refers to freedom *from* external restraints or limitations, positive liberty refers to the capacity or possibilities *to* self-determination and practicing one's intentions in relation to other's interests. Obviously, education is central for reaching capacity for self-determination in practice. Only because civil rights are formally recognized (negative liberty), this does not mean that an individual has reached a true capacity or resources to execute these rights productively. For this to occur, school didactics defends positive liberty as an educational aim – the citizen must be recognized as having the capacity and the right to have access to the cultural tools for acting in one's own interests as related to others' interests. Different students may need various degree of support to reach such cultural tools. This means that positive discrimination is accepted by school didactics. In this limited sense, a distributive perspective on justice is relevant for understanding education.

The implication of this reasoning for education is that we are able to identify two versions of affirmative education. *Reproduction-oriented affirmative education* does not accept negative liberty (freedom from external restraints). Instead, education is seen as non-reflective socialization into something existing. In contrast, *education as transformative affirmation* indeed accepts negative liberty by arguing for education as emancipation from primary socialization. However, education as transformative affirmation does not stop here, but moves on arguing in favour of positive emancipation. Positive emancipation defines what pre-defined future ends education should aim at. Differently expressed, affirmative education that is transformative, aims at replacing primary socialization with some other way of seeing the world, defined in advance. Such a view does not pay attention to the fact that an open society requires subjects able of shared reflection and capability to own decision-making regarding the future.

Non-affirmative school didactics accepts negative liberty, arguing that education needs to problematize students preconceived experiences in order to liberate *from* something. However, instead of replacing negative liberty with unreflected positive emancipation, i.e. to lead the learner to a replacing, but predetermined, view of the world, non-affirmative school didactics favours developing *positive liberty* among students, that is, to promote the learner's empirical, real capacity to practice one's freedom. In Snellman's (1861) words, by being led to 'the world of knowledge', the student reaches a cultural capital allowing her to move beyond her primary socialization (see Deng, 2016 for a contemporary discussion). The idea in non-affirmative education is to support the learner to reflectively and critically embrace those cultural, civic and societal insights, practices, abilities and tools, necessary for self-determinate action. To reach beyond experiences emanating in and from primary socialization, by moving to the world of knowledge, is to learn about that there exists ideas of what is counted as truth, in an epistemological sense. Pedagogically seen, however, the *educative* dimension of learning about such epistemological truths is understanding the relativity of this truth. To understand the idea of 'true knowledge' is to understand that

we apply conventions that momentarily reduce complexity. In discourses, there are always things taken for granted. These taken for granted things may, in turn, be made objects of scrutinization. The educative treatment of the ‘world of knowledge’ also includes understanding that truths are never totally devoid of values. Only by understanding what it means that ‘true’ descriptions of the world are value-laden, one can learn to discern between opinions and truth.

Both affirmative and non-affirmative education policies typically defend the idea of comprehensive education as mandatory. Some might think this appears contradictory on the part of non-affirmative education. Obviously, accepting education as compulsory indeed limits individual freedom – the individual is not allowed to choose not to learn. However, in non-affirmative education this limitation of individual freedom is legitimate given the aims of schooling, which in a first step is negative negative liberty, in order for reaching positive liberty or productive freedom. This is the answer to Kant’s question of how it is possible to promote freedom by coercion.

Non-affirmative school didactics share the assumption that education and politics, as two forms of societal practices, relate to each other in a *non-hierarchical* way. Such a view accepts that politics direct and regulate education, but reminds that we need to reserve enough degrees of freedom for schools, so that the educated subjects will become able not only to act in an existing society as it is, but also to step into it with an ability to contribute to reformulating the political agenda of society. According to non-affirmative theory, politics of education, therefore, should engage with a permanent open question: ‘To what extent and how strong should politics steer or regulate education practice?’ If politics in advance strictly tries to decide how a future generation should think and act, then, paradoxically, this would endanger the future of a democratic state. That is, democratic states need to educate its citizens *for* democracy. To educate for democracy means on the one hand to practice various forms of democratic life in schools, but also to critically reflect and problematize how *any* form of democracy operates. Political education does not mean to prepare the growing generation following some specific political ideology, but to learn about various political ideologies, to investigate their claims, study how they operate, and to question them all in order to find a position that can guide one’s own action oriented citizenship. School didactics is normative by defending political democracy while not promoting any given ideology.

Following this non-affirmative position, school didactics argues that education and politics do not have to be super- or subordinated to each other. Consequently, non-affirmative school didactics identifies curricular ideals in a democracy as resulting from a public dialogue involving politics, cultural reflection and professionals’ opinions. While political decision-making point out certain cultural contents to be dealt with in schools, the relative autonomy of educational practice recognizes this, but deals with these contents in a problematizing way, thereby opening up a space for the student’s own treatment allowing not only learning the contents as such but learning to see it in perspective. Non-affirmative school didactics reminds us that the teachers in compulsory school systems must recognize existing interests, policies, ideologies, utopias, and cultural practices as knowledge objects, but this position would not ask practitioners to affirm them. Not to affirm various predefined

interests means to not pass them on to the next generation, without making these interests into objects of critical reflection in pedagogical practice with students. According to non-affirmative school didactics, citizenship education for democracy cannot therefore be about straightforward socialization of youth into any given form of democracy, but must include experimental practice and critical reflection of historical, existing, and possible future versions of democracy. Non-affirmative school didactics defends the need for organizing social life in schools along given ethical principles, but connected with moral and political reasoning. Also in this perspective, non-affirmative school didactics supports reflective educational practice. This is what contributes to making school's social and pedagogical practice educative.

Compared with affirmative positions, school didactics assumes, with non-affirmative theory, first, that the future is open (non-teleological cosmology), second, that the question of morality cannot be finally decided upon in advance and, third, that education is not totally subordinate to politics, but is allowed to problematise existing interests with pedagogical motives.

To fulfil their task in a political democracy, school didactics view *schools as radical locations* for experimental practice and reflection. To say that schools are radical locations for reflection, does not mean that they are locations for radical reflection in terms of education for ideologically loaded activism. In democracies, political activism and revolution are important contents in citizenship education. This contents can be made an object for critical treatment, as any other content.

Non-affirmative didactics then also means to help learners understand the *questions* to which existing practices, norms or knowledge are answers. Through this the learner is thought to acquire a personal relation not only to given answers (positive knowledge), but also to critically reflect the questions behind the answers. Of equal importance is to develop the ability to formulate new questions to answer.

As this pedagogy avoids unreflective affirmation (or confirming) of existing or possible ideal future states of affairs, it is a pedagogy where the teacher hesitates, stops up, and to tries to focus the questions behind answers given (questions behind positive knowledge). Consequently, we see the school partly as an institution within society, and partly as an institution allowed to stand outside society, the state, and the family. In this respect, public schools in democracies are, as observed, radical locations for reflection, but not locations for political radicalisation, if radicalisation refers to affirmation of some predefined political ideology.

How Societal Interests Transform into Pedagogical Practice: A School Didactic Perspective

The second regulative principle in Benner's non-affirmative approach refers to how societal interests transform into pedagogical practice. Both the tradition of Didaktik, curriculum theory as well as policy research consider this transformation as a central topic. In practice, this occurs by a number of different mechanisms.

Curriculum research on these transformation processes cover several topics: (a) analysing the contents of curriculum (focusing the aims, contents, methods, etc.), (b) studying how schools and teachers enact existing curricula, and (c) studying curriculum reform activities, including policy work and educational leadership (Uljens & Rajakaltio, 2017). All three dimensions exemplify this second regulative principle. Sometimes, all these aspects are present in the same process. For example, curriculum reform activity features how curriculum is (i) initiated, (ii) enacted, and (iii) reflected, at different levels (Hopmann, 1999).

Empirically, it makes sense to try to identify different stages or phases of this reform process. In *curriculum reform* activity, initiating curriculum reform work is naturally different from implementing and enacting it. Yet, both initiation, implementation and enactment of the curriculum include elements of political, administrative, legal and pedagogical dimensions. It also makes sense to describe the discourses within and between different levels and parties (Wahlstrom & Sundberg, 2018) in a historical and comparative perspective.

A non-affirmative interpretation of school didactics recognizes this second regulative principle as dealing with the above issues. Curriculum and evaluation are two central regulative factors for understanding public education. Both activities are in most countries distributed across different levels. Sometimes curriculum and evaluation policies are not coordinated. At other occasions, they contradict each other. For example, in Finland, the most recent curriculum reform emphasized *transversal competencies*, thereby describing how generic competencies may appear related to specific teaching contents. Yet, most evaluation of learning is limited to evaluating subject matter knowledge. At times, tensions occur between the national and transnational level, a phenomenon familiar in the PISA process.

The critical point raised by non-affirmative theory is that transformation of societal interests in pedagogical practice should not jeopardize the schools' and teachers' possibilities to create a pedagogical space allowing the student's own treatment and reflection. In addition, as educative teaching aims at something beyond learning the actual content, for example, to develop the students general ability to deal with the field of knowledge in question, or other content- or context-transcending qualities, teaching must operate beyond mere transmission or transformation. In fact, it is only through the learners' *own activity* that Bildung as a kind of meta-learning is possible to reach. In a generational perspective, in such a process, learners come to realize we have access to knowledge that previous generations did not, and, at the same time, that our contemporary knowledge may appear as outdated in the future. Thus, the learner has come to see the question behind the answers.

Beyond Universal and Particularist Approaches to Transformation of Societal Interests

From the above we understand that the non-affirmative school didactics considers the transformation of societal interests as something operating across and within different levels. In Fig. 5.3, I talk about this in terms of various forms of educational leadership.

A dilemma with defending a multilevel perspective is how to connect these various levels conceptually in research. In order to relate non-affirmative school didactics to contemporary research approaches focusing on this transformation process, we begin by identifying two major research strategies for connecting these levels. For the sake of convenience, I call them *the universal* and *the particularist* approach.

Today, there are a number of positions representing a universal approach to studying transformation of societal interests into pedagogical practice. These include actor-network theory (ANT) (Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005), discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008), and refraction (Goodson & Rudd, 2012), but also Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, Yrjö Engeström's cultural-historical activity theory and Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development belong here. The strength of these approaches is their intention to offer a systematic language for analysing the dynamics within and across levels. As shown in Fig. 5.4, some of these universalist approaches are functionalist-conservative reproduction, while others are critical-transformative.

The reason why they are called *universal* is that they offer the very same conceptual language for understanding multi-level transformation processes in *any* societal

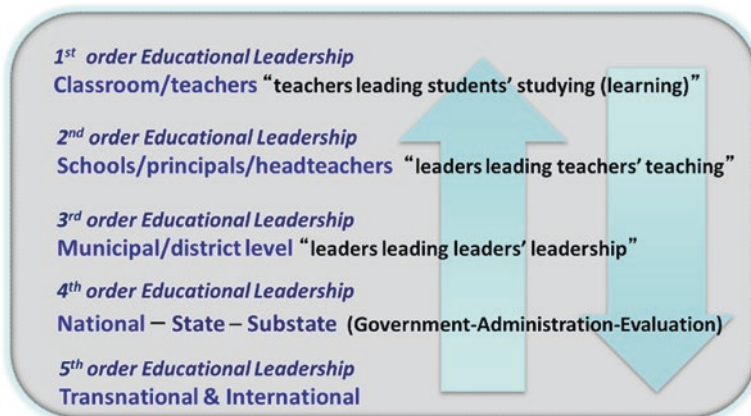


Fig. 5.3 A multilevel approach to understanding various forms of educational leadership, for example, policy work, educational leadership by municipal leaders and principals, teaching. (e.g. Uljens & Nyman, 2013; Uljens & Elo, 2019; Elo & Uljens, 2022)

	Universalist approaches Valid for <i>any</i> societal context, thereby losing sight of education	Particularist approaches Valid for education, but only for <i>separate levels</i> – teaching, leadership or <i>policy</i>
Reproductionist - Consensus theories - Functionalist oriented - Analytic / descriptive approaches - Discursive approaches	V. Schmidt – Discursive institutionalism	R. Tyler – Instructional design
	N. Luhmann – Systems theory	P. Heimann & O. Schulz – Berlin didaktik
	B. Latour – Actor Network Theory	L. Shulman – Ped. Content Knowledge
	G. Steiner-Khamsi – Policy borrowing	F. Marton – Phenomenography
	Y. Engeström – Cultural-Historical Activity Theory	U. P. Lundgren – Curriculum theory
		C. Day – Successful leadership
		M. Fullan – Systems leadership
Critical and emancipatory transformation - Conflict theories - Normative approaches	I. Goodson – Refraction	C. Shields – Transformative leadership
	S. Ball – Policy enactment – power decentered in discursive policy cycle	W. Klafki – Critical-constr. Didaktik
	I. Wallerstein – World systems theory	W. Carr & S. Kemmis - Action research
	P. McLaren – Critical curriculum theory	

Fig. 5.4 Universal and particularist approaches in explaining the multilevel character of how societal interests transform into pedagogical practice in the light of reproduction-oriented and critical transformation-oriented approaches

practice – education, healthcare, communication, traffic, taxation, legal system or city planning. From an educational perspective, this universal character is also their weakness. They typically lack an idea of education, and when they represent an idea of education, they are either reproductionist or normative.

The *particularist* approach to understanding transformation of societal interests into pedagogical practice requires a multidisciplinary approach. Such an approach argues that curriculum reform and implementation is best studied with the help of theories and disciplines that *supplement* each other – educational policy analysis, governance research, educational leadership studies, organizational theory and research on teaching and learning. By combining different theories, the whole system is studied, the argument runs. Yet, in practice, we seldom see such cross-disciplinary research initiatives, combining, for example, didaktik and leadership research. As a result, the particularist strategy may risk remaining blind for the true multilevel character of school teaching.

As an alternative to the universalist and the particularist strategies, non-affirmative school didactics defend the idea that research on how societal interests

transform to pedagogical practice ultimately must be based on a *theory of education* in order to be educationally relevant. The task for a theory of education would be to provide us with a conceptual idea that allows us to treat these levels coherently. The meaningfulness of claiming that these different levels connect by a single pedagogical idea depends on if we can demonstrate that it is possible for all levels involved to adopt to such an idea or principle.

Non-affirmative education theory offers the following question as a criterion for identifying a unifying principle. To what extent do all levels involved, in their summoning activities, recognize that transformation of societal interests do not violate the principle of the student's self-active engagement with the learning contents, in order to reach insights in fundamental dimensions of the knowledge, central for culture and society? When looking at how transformative education policy or a conservative transmission policy answers this question, we see that they do not guarantee the degrees of freedom required.

Consequently, we need to reserve certain *degrees of freedom* for *each and every* level working with the transformation of societal interests into pedagogical practice. The different levels are to varying degree recognized as having the right to contribute to how this transformation is put into practice. However, transformation of societal interests into pedagogical practice is not only a question of administration, governance or finances. It occurs through a multitude of various processes. In this connection, we highlight only one limited aspect, as an example. This is the question of the pedagogical dimension of educational leadership (see also Elo & Uljens, 2022).

Non-affirmative school didactics argues that non-affirmative general pedagogy is better equipped to understand pedagogical work in schools including the system, than the above universal approaches as they lack an idea of education. Non-affirmative general pedagogy is also better equipped than the particularist approaches as they aim to combine very different theories. In line with this, non-affirmative school didactics argues that education theory offers us a language for understanding the *what* or the object of leadership – teaching-studying-learning process. Education theory also offers as a language for the pedagogical dimensions of educational leadership. By pedagogical dimensions of educational leadership I refer to those activities at different levels where education leaders, for example, promote professional development among professionals horizontally working within a given organisation or vertically across different levels of the education system. For example, the initiation, development and implementation of new curricula, include *pedagogical activity* at different levels. In this view, transformation of societal interests to pedagogical practice is to a significant extent mediated by pedagogical qualities of educational leadership. While non-affirmative school didactics argues for the necessity of a multilevel approach, it maintains a distinction between educational leadership and pedagogical leadership. Educational leadership refers to a multilevel and networked phenomenon concerning the governance (management, leadership, and development) of institutionalised education. Educational leadership involves leadership of educational institutions at a teacher-, school-, district-, national-, or supranational level. Educational leadership operate on all of these levels and include all aspects of

what it means to manage, lead, and develop an educational institution (e.g. legally, organisationally, economically, relationally, pedagogically, or technologically). In this light, pedagogical leadership is only one dimension of educational leadership.

For example, national authorities may address or summon teachers in whole countries to make sense self-actively of a new policy. Also, if leaders are provided the degrees of freedom mentioned above, leaders at different levels may live up to the principle of non-affirmative summoning co-workers to engage in professional learning and development processes. The regulative principle of ‘transformation of societal interests’ may thus be applied as an analytical lens in comparative research: To what extent is the non-affirmative character of summoning and *Bildsamkeit* embraced as elements of pedagogical leadership?

In other words, non-affirmative school didactics support the idea of extending of summoning to self-activity and *Bildsamkeit*, from only covering educative teaching to include the pedagogical dimensions of educational leadership. Pedagogical activities lead curriculum implementation and enactment processes. For example, national authorities typically invite teachers and principals to reflect on the meaning of a new curricular initiative. Implementation and enactment of curricula is therefore also a pedagogical intervention. Here pedagogical intervention does not mean brute implementation of ready-made ideas but invitation to dialogue. In doing so, *pedagogical leadership as curriculum work* (Uljens, 2015; Elo & Uljens, 2022) recognizes the relative autonomy of the professional actors. The effects of a curriculum reform activity are then, obviously, also in the hands of the receivers enacting these intentions (*Bildsamkeit*). The curriculum-making discourse as invitation to self-activity and self-formation creates spaces within and between institutional levels.

Finally, leadership and management is more often than before related to the development of organisations’ operative culture. To lead such change processes involves more than supervising individual co-workers. Nonetheless, developing the operational culture is also a pedagogical task, as it aims at influencing this operational culture via professionals learning oriented activity. In school didactics, *developmental leadership* is primarily a pedagogical task and thus an object for educational theory to explain.

We think the above argumentation provides good reasons to approach educational leadership, and especially the pedagogical dimensions of it, utilizing non-affirmative pedagogy (Uljens, 2015; Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017; Elo & Uljens, 2022). We believe that such an approach proves valuable when trying to overcome some of the difficulties following from universalist approaches to governance, insensitive for specificities of education institutions, and difficulties with particularist approaches that indeed do combine separate conceptual languages, yet not very well connected, thus resulting in disparate views.

Non-affirmative school didactics and education theory in general is considered fit for these purposes. Despite obvious differences, the very same theoretical constructs apply for analysing (a) the teaching-studying-learning process related to the aims and teaching contents of the curriculum and (b) the pedagogical dimensions of educational leadership in curriculum reform activity at different levels.

The third position beyond particularist and universalist positions represented by non-affirmative school didactics thus consist in an idea of *pedagogical leadership* of a certain kind that occurs on any level of the education system. This idea of pedagogical leadership thus consists of interpretative mediation involving the recognition of external influences but without affirming them. *Non-affirmative summoning* provides a tool to analyse in what ways and to what extent pedagogic actors, leaders, or institutions affirm either horizontal or vertical interests when they collaboratively mediate in a multilevel and networked system. This position provides a tool for analysing to what extent pedagogical summons are affirmative in character, that is, to what extent they require affirmative response.

Using Non-affirmative School Didactics for Identifying Policy Positions

As previously described, school didactics feature a *multilevel* approach regarding both (a) *curriculum work* and (b) *evaluation*. When we structure the multilevel character of curriculum work and evaluation, as in Fig. 5.5, we are able to use non-affirmative school didactics to identify four ideally different education policy positions.

Figure 5.5 identifies, first, four different policy positions with respect to (a) curriculum making as something centrally or locally governed, and (b) by viewing assessment as something internally controlled by the school or something externally regulated. By the help of these two dimensions, we may describe developments in many countries regarding their educational policies during the past five decades

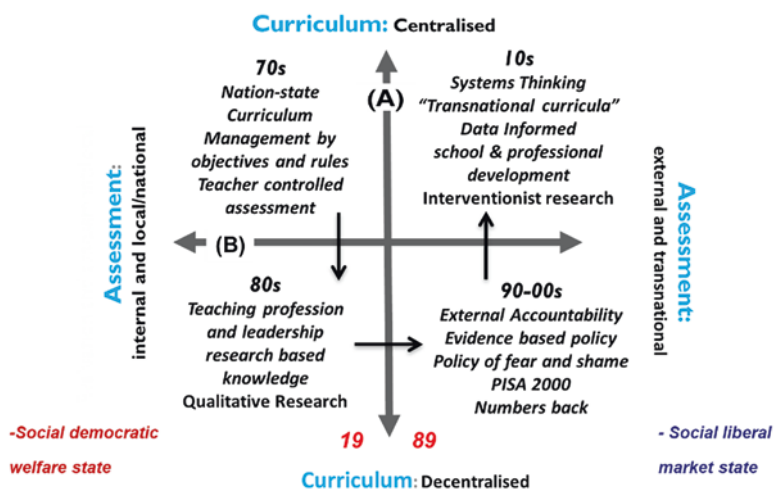


Fig. 5.5 Five decades (1970–2020) of curriculum reform and assessment practices, related to broader political developments. (Following Uljens & Nyman, 2013)

(1970–2020). Second, on a more general level, Fig. 5.5 allows us to describe the transition from a *social-democratic welfare state* approach to curriculum and assessment in Europe (old public administration, OPA), to a neoliberal competition-oriented policy in the *social liberal market state* (new public management, NPM). Compared with Benner's regulative principles, the policy positions in Fig. 5.5 show how societies transform existing interests into pedagogical practice in four different ways. On good grounds, we may expect that countries that accepting local curricula and defending teachers as the main responsible for evaluation of student performances, are more likely to apply the principles of non-affirmative education. For example, countries applying accountability-oriented assessment policy where students performances are seen as indicators of teaching quality, assume a false causal relation between teaching and learning, overlooking the students mediating role between teaching and learning.

The turn toward affirmative education policy challenged an established European post-war *Bildung*-centred and citizenship-oriented view of human learning and growth, which emphasizes reflective identity, personality, character, self-determination, autonomy and political and economic citizenship (Klafki, 1995; Hopmann, 2015; von Oettingen, 2016). One of the cornerstones of modern *Bildung* is the notion of autonomy (*Mündigkeit*) as the highest objective of education, that is, ability to discerning thought, moral awareness and reflected action regarding issues of both knowledge and values. Thus, autonomy in the *Bildung* tradition is not a performative competence but refers rather to a life orientation reflecting an idea of *being* as a process of continuous becoming. It is about an ability to form a personal idea of the world, see one's role in it given shared knowledge, others' interests, and act accordingly.

In addition to neoliberally influenced ideas of human competence, developments in education policy and curricula, we have also witnessed a culturally conservative or neoconservative movement in curriculum-making. It is a kind of back to basics orientation, emphasizing content learning and identity. One example of such a position, critical to neoliberal competency policy, is the one represented by the British sociologist Michael Young (2008). According to his idea of 'powerful knowledge', the task of public education is to provide all students with strong insights in substance knowledge. Such 'powerful knowledge' would then not be restricted to training performative qualifications and competencies like rule following or technical efficiency, but support students attainment of real insights and knowledge not accessible in everyday life. Powerful knowledge allow the learner to maintain authority by knowing based on understanding. However, as Deng (2021) demonstrates, the notion of powerful knowledge is founded in epistemology rather than theory of education, and *Didaktik*, thereby missing out the idea of educative teaching (*Bildung*).

For non-affirmative school didactics both directions, that is, the competency- as well as the content-oriented policy, appear one-sided. They simply repeat the old debate between formal and material theories of *Didaktik*, and variations thereof (Willbergh, 2016). This old debate deals with why, how and when generic

knowledge should be prioritized over disciplinary subject-specific knowledge, or the other way around (Deng, 2016). Recent OECD policy revitalized this perennial issue.

In this context, we remind that most countries have naturally not forgotten the long-standing educational ideals of critical thinking, ethical responsibility, recognition and respect of the Other, or personal and civic autonomy. Yet, the weight of these ideals have diminished while performative abilities and instrumental competencies related to working life, or, alternatively, more content-centred approaches, have strengthened. Similarly, the previous era in Europe (1945–1989) naturally also prepared for participation in working life, but in comparison emphasizing less economic citizenship as an educational ideal.

Besides promoting the development of the above general abilities regarding social, cultural-ethical, political, rational and economic autonomy and citizenship, there is need to recall that teaching typically also intends to promote additional sets of general capabilities that are content-related. This set of general capabilities relate to the subject matter or fields of knowledge taught at school. As teaching only is capable of addressing a limited selection of topics within each school subject, this content need to be representative in the sense that it opens up for principled insight into the domain in question. Thus, practicing specific arithmetic calculations aims at developing the student's mathematical thinking generally. Besides being valuable insights as such, teaching about rivers, mountains and cities in geography, aims, at a more general level, to an ability to understand formations of the earth, and how human culture relate to nature. In addition to learning about specific historical events, teaching history aims at developing a sense for history as something that results from human activity, and that everybody acting today creates future history. Such a non-teleological cosmology also bears the seeds of a pedagogy of hope. As the future is not about turning pages in a ready-written book, education is about learning to become a co-author the book itself. Agency, self-determination and ethical awareness become central in such a perspective.

School didactics, first, identify *both* general aims of education as meaningful: (a) aims transcending the contents (development of critical thinking, curiosity, experimental thinking, ethical awareness, a coherent personality, political agency, etc.) and (b) content-related general aims (e.g. ability of linguistic, mathematical, historical thinking as well as finding out how these fields or practice and knowledge interests the individual). Second, educative teaching in school didactics supports the attainment of both types of general aims as mediated by working with the subject matter (the what of teaching) in relation to learner's own experiences, and mediated by the way pedagogical activities are *socially* organized in schools (the how of teaching). Third, in practice these dimensions are intertwined and do not occur as separate from each other. What would something like capability of critical thinking or moral responsibility be, as distinct from any content and the learner's life experiences life (context)? These capabilities appear always in relation to content and context.

Bildung and *Bildsamkeit* in School Didactics

Bildung is a difficult concept to translate into English. However, its use in German, or in the Scandinavian languages, is also loaded with very different meanings and has been a fuzzy concept for very long (Lenzen, 1997, pp. 122–133; Hopmann, 2007; Sjöström & Eilks, 2020). In theories of Bildung, various aspects are emphasized:

- Bildung as a *capacity* concept. Here Bildung refers to the human ability or capacity to learn or reflect, that is, Bildung as a human trait, indirectly featuring the idea of the individual as indeterminate, and that it is possible to influence the individual.
- Bildung as a *activity* concept. Here Bildung is not a capacity nor a process concept, but refer to the individual's self-directed activity in experiencing and structuring the world.
- Bildung as a *process* concept. Here Bildung does not refer to an inherent capacity, but to an ongoing process – by participating in everyday activities humans learn.
- Bildung as a *state* or *condition* concept. Here Bildung, refers to the results of an individual's learning process, or the aims education strives at.
- Bildung as an *influence* concept. Here Bildung refers to pedagogical activity aimed at influencing somebody else studying or learning. In a broader sense, this notion refers to institutions involved ('Bildungswesen', 'Bildungsverwaltung', 'Bildungspolitik').

Non-affirmative theory of education and Bildung offers us a possibility to clarify how all these different versions of *Bildung* relate to each other and how we can describe the concept of *Bildsamkeit*, so central in this theory.

The principle of *Bildsamkeit* refers, first, to the individual as not being determined by anything, nor determined to anything but to her freedom. In this respect, the first above version of Bildung exists as a premise: the human being endows the capacity to learn from experience. Yet, second, Bildung as *Bildsamkeit* does not refer to a learning process as such, as *learning* is not an activity, but something that happens with us. Teaching, however, is an activity, so is studying. We cannot decide to learn, but we can decide to *try* to learn, that is, to 'study'. In this perspective, *Bildsamkeit* instead refer to that the learner is *recognized* as an originally active subject, with potentiality to learn. This potentiality becomes real by the subject's own actions that operate relationally on the world as experienced.

In phenomenology, intentionality of the mind refers primarily to human awareness as being directed *to the world as experienced*. Intentionality refer to the unity between the act of directing awareness, and the object as experienced, which is what the individual is aware of (Uljens, 1992). Like in phenomenology, also in *Bildsamkeit*, this directedness is in no way capsulated to an inner solipsist world – rather, it is about being *in* the world, *with* the world. *Bildsamkeit* as the subject's directedness to the world thus includes a self-active dimension operating with

phenomena external to the subjects, but still operating with these phenomena as they are experienced. In this light, Bildung as *Bildsamkeit* is an activity concept.

In other words, the subject, already by herself orients herself to the world. It is this relational orientation towards the world that opens up a possibility to understand pedagogical interventions as a part of the subject's experienced world, and towards which the subject may turn her attention. One might say *Bildsamkeit* offers a possibility for pedagogical interventions, or that *Bildsamkeit* makes such pedagogical influencing meaningful. School didactics embraces such a view.

Consequently, teaching in terms of pedagogical summoning is an intervention in the subject's existing active world relation, through which the individual continuously repositions herself in relation to herself, to others and to the world. Thus, also in pedagogical situations learners' own attention and activity mediate pedagogically designed influences, possibly resulting in learning. Consequently, in this perspective educative teaching is about summoning the subject to self-activity through which the subject may transcend her current experiences, by working with selected contents, ultimately understanding oneself as a subject capable of self-determined action.

"*Bildsamkeit*" denoting the previously described universal feature of what it is to be human – to stand in such a dynamic relation to others, the world and oneself – is thus a precondition for teaching. In the teaching-studying-learning process, I want to identify a specific class of activities on the learner's side, namely those very activities that may come into being as initiated by the teacher's summoning. The learner may accept the teachers' summoning as an invitation to engage in studying. Both teaching and the student's activity have a reasonably clear beginning and end. These specific activities on the side of the student or pupil appear as a type of *Bildsamkeit* beyond the mere capacity to learn, and beyond human everyday activities involving sense-making. *Bildsamkeit*, in the form of the student's sense-making activity or reaching beyond existing knowledge or competence, when engaged in *pedagogically* initiated processes, I call 'study activity'.

To sum up, the principle of *Bildsamkeit*, including the idea of human plasticity, makes teaching through summoning to self-activity possible. On the one hand, as *Bildsamkeit* is relational in reaching out towards and operating the world, educational influences form a part of the individual's external world. Thus, this concept allows education to operate as an influence, yet not assuming that external influences determine the subject. On the other hand, it accepts humans as fundamentally self-active, yet not assuming the individual as capable by itself to acquire conceptual knowledge only by mere participation in social life. In this respect, education appears both as something possible, but also necessary. In its own way, the position is an answer on the Kantian question of how to promote development of individual freedom by external force. In the above perspective, education is something necessary for the individual in reaching cultural autonomy by embracing general or knowledge or principled insight. From a school didactic perspective, this implies that mandatory education is congruent with education promoting self-determination and autonomy in a political democracy.

Pedagogical Work as Summoning Self-Activity

As observed above, in school didactics, educative teaching in terms of summoning self-activity carves out a position between, or rather beyond, an idea of the individual as externally determined either by contents or other's individuals (determinism) and internally driven (radical constructivism, transcendental idealism, trait psychology). In this light, summoning and *Bildsamkeit* in terms of an invited activity are relational – teaching as summoning requires *Bildsamkeit* as an anthropological condition, while *Bildsamkeit* as study activity always point at experiencing influences in terms of teaching contents presented as representing something in relation to the individuals previous understanding. In this respect, how the subject develops depend on, but is not determined by teaching. What comes out of an education process, we cannot know in advance. Summoning recognizes the subject with potential to come to understand herself as the free and indeterminate being she is. But, by acquiring cultural tools, individuals also reach a freedom, beyond the freedom or openness given by birth. In this respect, the individual reaches cultural or productive freedom only among other human beings.

Through educational actions from the teacher's side, with the learning subject, a *transitional space of Bildung* is established. This *pedagogical space* is a temporary construction, a space that depends on the engagement of the subjects involved. This experiential or virtual space is a space in which the learner does not feel alone but experiences being recognized, experiences being accepted but also challenged, experiences being involved in working on a topic. This space offers the subject a learning opportunity to exceed herself.

Insofar as educational activity summons the learner's self-activity, it entails (1) recognizing the subject's potentiality and ability to engage in self-directed learning, but also, importantly, (2) being attentive to the concrete life situation of the other, their phenomenological or experiential reality and personal life history. Such cultural awareness and knowledge is important.

Recognition and the Tact of Teaching How the learner appears to perceive herself and the world is crucial, and it points to the phenomenological sphere of interest. It is important for a learner to experience the teacher as somebody who cares for her and somebody who is present for her in the educational situation, that is, to meet and see the student as she appears as an existential subject to the teacher.

A further dimension of recognition relates to the educator's actions supporting the individual's right to develop a reflected own will. If the establishment of the individual's self-image is dependent on social interaction with others, and if the ability to discerning and critical, autonomous thinking are recognized as individual rights, then pedagogical activity appears as a response to the moral demand that arises from recognizing these particular rights (Fichte, 2000).

The teacher's recognition consists in truly seeing the Other as a unique subject, assuming both that the individual's development is not determined by something totally pre-given and that the growing persons are entitled to develop a 'voice' of

their own, through own activity. Pedagogical encouragement thus points to the need to observe how a child responds to the call for self-activity, without assuming (as in conventional affirmative pedagogy) that they should end up at a predetermined form of perception.

A non-affirmative call for self-activity in schools assumes that the study process is guided, by definition, also by the student's own voice. The teacher's use of communicative provocations as educational actions should deliberately refrain from unproblematic confirmation of both current social interests and ideal future states. Such a conscious pedagogical judgement creates spaces for meaningful study activity, acknowledging the student's right to exercise conscious initiatives and actions within the educational dialogue.

The non-affirmative approach also has to deal with a pedagogical paradox, but now in a new version. Following Benner's interpretation, this version of the paradox states that the individual has to be treated *as if* she/he were already capable of what she/he is being encouraged to do (Benner, 2015). An example of this is, when a child, close to learning to stand on her/his own feet, is asked to take a few steps across the floor to a waiting adult who will embrace her/him. Here caretaker treats the child *as if* it can walk already, even if it is only through responding to the parent's call, that the child, by their own activity, actually may learn to take her first steps in life. Yet, it is an open question whether this happens or not: time will tell, but we do not know for sure in advance. When Herbart refers to the concept of *pedagogical tact*, his intention is to show that the call not only falls back upon recognition of the freedom of others, but that it must, in order to function, be experienced as reasonable by the other person in the dialogue. In such tactful action, the pedagogue shows awareness of the empirical reality, life situation, and identity of others.

Concluding Remark

This chapter started from the assumption that educational *theories* are historical and contextual in nature. Thus, while universally valid theories are assumed impossible, ambitions to develop *general* approaches are defended, expecting them being conceptually broad enough and capable of responding to global developments the past decades. The idea in this chapter was to discuss, from the perspective of school didactics, the feasibility of some core concepts developed within earlier and later modern of theory of Bildung and theory of education, especially as conceptualized by Dietrich Benner. School didactics was read by the help of these concepts, to more precisely determine the school as a radical institution for pedagogical work promoting Bildung.

As a result, given how school didactics was originally developed as a conceptual system, and given the sources it drew on both with respect to empirical phenomenology, previous German Didaktik, curriculum theory and the forgotten Hegelian roots of Finnish education theory, school didactics was possible to reinterpret along the principles as explored by Dietrich Benner. Also, a distinction between the

concepts of recognition (Anerkennung) and summoning (Aufforderung) was considered motivated. Recognition would thus refer to a kind of affirmation of the learner as a human being capable of learning, and recognition of the learner's rights, which correspond to the educator's moral responsibilities, but also to recognition of the learner as a person. Summoning, in turn, challenges the learner's experiences. Keeping these separate for analytical reasons is useful for identifying how pedagogical activity operate as a balancing act between various interests in compulsory education. Perhaps the distinction makes it easier to talk about pedagogical activity and Bildung as the creation of a *experiential pedagogical space* allowing the learner to create a necessary distance to one's personal experiences by the help of teaching content, and simultaneously to evaluate what possible meaning and validity the contents may have given the life experiences of the learner. This dialectical activity between reflecting the contents against one's experiences and one's experiences against the contents may allow the learner think differently, or be critical of the content's validity. In both cases, we see growth. Further, the chapter reminded of that *Bildsamkeit* may first be perceived as an anthropological precondition featuring human existence, and second, as that specific activity the learner responds by being invited or summoned in a pedagogical situation. The position developed in this chapter may therefore be labelled non-affirmative school didactics.

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Part III
Non-affirmative Education and Related
Theoretical Positions

Chapter 6

Dewey, Existential Uncertainty and Non-affirmative Democratic Education



Andrea R. English

Abstract In this chapter, I show how John Dewey’s understanding of the educational meaning of existential uncertainty lies at the heart of his idea of democratic education. Specifically, I argue that Dewey’s theory of democratic education is grounded in a concept of transformative learning that necessarily involves experiences of existential uncertainty, and, in a concept of teaching that necessarily involves supporting learners’ opportunities to have educative experiences of existential uncertainty. In doing so, I aim to bring this democratic aspect of Dewey’s notion of teaching into sharper relief by showing how it offers a productive extension of the tradition of *non-affirmative* educational theory. In section one, “[Uncertainty and the beginning of learning](#)”, I discuss the notion of existential uncertainty and its relation to what Dewey called “the indeterminate situation” as a realm of learning that we find ourselves in *prior to* searching for and finding a problem, and thus logically prior to solving it. In section two, “[Existential uncertainty, teaching and democratic education](#)”, I discuss Dewey’s notion of teaching within the context of his broader theory of democratic education, highlighting it as a form of teaching that is non-affirmative, by contrasting it to “traditional, transmissive” and, what I call, “reductive-progressive” forms of teaching. In the final section, “[Listening and Relationality](#)”, I build on and move beyond Dewey to formulate a notion of the *teacher as a listener*. I argue that this understanding of the teacher is vitally relevant for the theory and practice of democratic education as non-affirmative education, and yet is in danger of being lost in the current measurement culture in education.

Keywords John Dewey · Democratic education · Uncertainty · Teaching · Transformative learning · Listening · *Bildung* · Non-affirmative education · Measurement culture in education

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M. Uljens (ed.), *Non-affirmative Theory of Education and Bildung*,
Educational Governance Research 20,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30551-1_6

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Introduction

When we ask ourselves what it is like to be uncertain, it may conjure up feelings of anxiety or worry. Uncertainty can imply a calling into question, or even an undoing, of something we were certain about. As such, it can be coupled with a sense of unsettledness or feeling lost. Thus, in everyday life, uncertainty is something we often want to avoid. Yet, in educational contexts, uncertainty can have educative value.

In this chapter, I show how John Dewey's understanding of the educational meaning of existential uncertainty lies at the heart of his idea of democratic education. Specifically, I argue that Dewey's theory of democratic education is grounded in a concept of transformative learning that necessarily involves experiences of existential uncertainty, and, in a concept of teaching that necessarily involves supporting learners' opportunities to have educative experiences of existential uncertainty. In doing so, I aim to bring this democratic aspect of Dewey's notion of teaching into sharper relief by showing how it offers a productive extension of the tradition of *non-affirmative* educational theory.

The lens of non-affirmative educational theory (Benner, 1987/2015, 1990, 2022) offers a way of differentiating "affirmative" from "non-affirmative" forms of teaching.¹ Accordingly, affirmative forms of teaching aim to educate the younger generation to affirm the existing order, or to affirm a future order as conceived of by the educators themselves. Non-affirmative forms of teaching aim to educate the younger generation towards the development of capacities to critically participate in an ongoing discussion of how the future should be shaped.

Taking this definition further from a Deweyan perspective, I add that, on my view, affirmative teaching predetermines individual and social problems *for* the next generation (notably, what Dewey criticised as "traditional education" has all the hallmarks of such affirmative teaching, as I show below). On the other hand, non-affirmative teaching supports the next generations' critical, reflective capacities to co-determine what counts as a problem, individual or social, in the first place.

In section one, I discuss the notion of existential uncertainty and its relation to what Dewey called "the indeterminate situation" as a realm of learning that we find ourselves in *prior to* searching for and finding a problem, and thus logically prior to solving it. In this realm, the learner experiences a kind of existential uncertainty as the *felt* beginning of learning; it is where the learner's genuine needs as a human being emerge. I discuss how this realm is essential for understanding how learners come to formulate their own problems, or what I call "learner-dependent" problems,

¹I am using the term teaching to refer to educating another person through pedagogical interaction, which aligns closely to Benner's (2022) idea of *Erziehung*, which is translated as education. On this meaning, education is linked to the Latin, *educare*, meaning "to pull forth." A different sense of the word "education" is captured in the idea of learning or growth as a process of self-transformation, found in the German word *Bildung*, which I also discuss in the chapter. On these German terms, *Erziehung* and *Bildung* and their relation to Dewey's use of the term education, see also Benner, 2017, and; English & Doddington, 2019.

as opposed to “learner-independent,” teacher-, textbook-, or system-defined problems. In section two, I discuss Dewey’s notion of teaching within the context of his broader theory of democratic education. I focus on how the teacher is vital for cultivating learners’ opportunities to make meaning from experiences of existential uncertainty. I underscore that the nature of this form of teaching is non-affirmative, by contrasting it to “traditional, transmissive” and, what I call, “reductive-progressive” forms of teaching. In the final section, I build on and move beyond Dewey to formulate a notion of the *teacher as a listener*. I argue that this understanding of the teacher is vitally relevant for the theory and practice of democratic education as non-affirmative education, and yet is in danger of being lost in the current measurement culture in education.

Before I continue, I would like to share my own history of coming to know non-affirmative educational theory as conceptualised by Dietrich Benner (the focus of this edited volume). I was first drawn to Benner’s work on the education system of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). I had previously studied GDR and US history education and my finding was that *both* national education systems adopted indoctrinating modes of teaching history. At the time, without realising it, I was already making conceptual distinctions along the lines of affirmative versus non-affirmative educational theory. When I came to study at the Institute of Education (*Institut für Erziehungswissenschaft*) at *Humboldt University Berlin*, one of my first courses was on J. F. Herbart’s theory of education. This study of Herbart inspired me to pursue philosophy of education (*Allgemeine Pädagogik*) with an aim of understanding what constitutes non-authoritarian, non-oppressive education.

From this history of ideas, the fundamental educational question that has emerged for me is: How is it possible to educate non-affirmatively, that is, in a way that nurtures the learner’s capacity to learn and ensures that the integrity of the learner’s being and humanity remains unharmed? I am interested in how working across traditions of philosophy of education, rather than strictly within one, can foster a productive conversation that helps us (as educators, and as a society) to learn not only what is possible, but also what is desirable, in educating the next generation. This chapter should be read as continuing that conversation through the lens of non-affirmative educational theory by situating Dewey’s thinking firmly in the history of those non-affirmative education philosophical ideas that Benner discusses in his opening chapter (2022, this volume; see also Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017).

Uncertainty and the Beginning of Learning

While Dewey recognised problems as important in learning, he took issue with the idea that problems are the starting point of learning. This is at the heart of Dewey’s well-known critique of traditional education (e.g. Dewey, 1916/2008). He was critical of traditional education – or what today can be referred to as “transmissive teaching” – because of how it provided learners with “ready-made problems.” Ready-made problems are pre-defined problems, formulated independently of the

learners within the given learning situation. These are problems defined by the teacher or textbook with equally ready-made answers for memorisation and recitation. Dewey's interest lay in how we, as human beings, arrive at a problem in the first place. How we arrive at problems is meaningful if educators are to be able to refrain from imposing established problems onto learners as ones the learners *should* have, or worse, from presenting established problems *as if* they were the learners' own. So the question for Dewey – and on my view, the critical question for understanding Deweyan non-affirmative teaching – was how do learners come to formulate their own problems? His answer reveals that learners' experiences of existential uncertainty can be understood as a necessary part of inciting the thinking that occurs on the path to searching for and finding problems.

Predetermined, learner-independent, ready-made problems – the sort Dewey criticised – are part of a system of education that assumes that everything worthwhile is known, and thus a system that sees the job of the educator as passing on the known to learners. In this context, problems are what Dewey called problems for the learner as “a pupil,” that is, a student engaged in strategic forms of learning aimed at getting quickly to right answers, rather than for the learner “as a human being” (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 163). On this model of education, what is posed as a problem by the teacher is actually a completed thought in the guise of a problem, which learners are meant to consume passively.

What Dewey pointed out in his critique of such forms of transmissive teaching is how they hinder the learner's capacity to think. Dewey argued that the pre-packaged knowledge that is handed down from teacher to learner to be passively consumed can only be “reproduced in recitation” (Dewey, 1916/2008, pp. 160–163). Here, we can say that knowledge is the “food” that learners are meant to merely regurgitate. As such, the knowledge and ideas do not genuinely affect the learner. In other words, how the learner thinks, feels, judges, acts and makes meaning remains *unchanged*. On such an input-output model of education involving direct, transmissive teaching, the learner may be able to recite something told to him or her with accuracy, but we can say that nothing has been “digested.”

The fact that the learner as a person remains unaffected by the ideas being handed down is only one reason why Dewey considered this traditional, transmissive model problematic. There is also another reason, namely, that in transmissive teaching, the finished ideas passed down to the learner fail to be affected *by* the learner. In other words, the individual learner's mind – her particular needs, questions, curiosities, prior experiences, ways of thinking, knowing and doing – has no impact on the ideas themselves: the learner, as a particular human being, does not matter to what is being learned.

As a way of summarising Dewey's two-fold criticism, we can say that the learner has no generative power in transmissive “learning” situations: just as the learner does not grow, so too, the ideas, as meanings and connections that are part of socially

communicated understandings, do not grow.² Another way of putting this is that on the traditional, transmissive approach, the teacher's interactions with learners do not initiate learners' reflective, transformative learning processes (English, 2013). That is, they do not initiate the kinds of experiences that cultivate what Dewey called "growth" (or using the German term, what we can refer to as *Bildung*), wherein self and world are in interplay, and both transform on account of such interplay (e.g. Dewey, 1916/2008, pp. 56–57; Benner, 2017; English, 2013; English & Doddington, 2019).

The central fallacy of this traditional, transmissive approach is its conception of the structure of learning: it places no educative value, in theory or practice, on the human experience of limitation as constitutive of learning processes (Benner 2003; Benner & English, 2004; English, 2013). Experiences of limitation refer to those moments in which we encounter something new and unexpected, such as a new idea or object, in a way that points to the fact that we do not yet know, do not yet understand or are not yet be able to do something. In other words, we experience a *limit* to our own established knowledge and ability.³

In contrast to transmissive models, in his educational theory, Dewey placed vital significance on the human experience of limitation as constituting the beginning of learning (English, 2013). To understand experiences of limitation as part of the structure of human learning, it is helpful to look at one of Dewey's recurring examples. Dewey described the case of an infant, who cannot yet crawl, but who is trying to reach an object that is out of reach of her outstretched arm, but within her visual field (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 50). At the moment of trying to, and yet not being able to, grasp the object, the infant undergoes an experience of the limits of her existing knowledge or ability. In other words, she experiences what she cannot yet do.

These limit-experiences, as I will refer to them here, can make us question what we have, up to that point in time, taken-for-granted as true, known or part of what we are able to do. These moments are experienced as "discontinuities" in learning – breaks or interruptions in the smooth flow of experience – which inform how we understand ourselves and the world around us, and thus how we make meaning (English, 2013; English & Doddington, 2019). There are plenty of other examples of such limit-experiences that are more readily identifiable when observing young children freely exploring their surroundings. For example, when my daughter was just learning to stand, she saw a tablecloth corner hanging from the table, pulled herself up, tugged on the cloth corner, and then had a moment of hesitation as the plastic cups atop the table began to wobble. She watched the cups until they settled with a face of wonder and perplexity. As Dewey would tell us, encounters with the

²Paulo Freire's popular notion of "banking education" takes much from Dewey's criticism of traditional education, although these connections remain underexplored in the research.

³This idea – that encounters with the limits of one's knowledge and ability are part of the structure of human learning – has been traced through the works of Plato, Rousseau, Herbart, Dewey, Freire and contemporary thinkers, see e.g. Benner 2003; Benner & English, 2004; English, 2013, 2016a, b.

limits of one's knowledge and ability are just as much a part of a child's experience of free play as they are of a scientist's new discoveries in a lab.

Significantly, Dewey pointed out how these experiences open up a realm of existential uncertainty that is *educative*. He delimited this realm of existential uncertainty using the term "indeterminate situation" (see e.g. Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 158; 1922/2008, p. 213; 1933/2008, p. 200; 1938/2008, pp. 109–12). Looking back at the above examples, we can say that in each of the cases, the learner had an experience of her own limitation that placed her into an indeterminate situation, where she (even for a split second) was not sure what happened, that is, not sure why the object could not be reached, or, not sure why the cups wobbled. Dewey highlighted the embodied existential feeling of such indeterminate situations. He wrote, the type of uncertainty we feel is "not cognitive," rather it is pre-cognitive or pre-reflective, like when our "footing is unsure" (Dewey, 1942/2008, p. 40). These moments involve our whole being, and thus they can be difficult, even painful to endure; something is troublesome, but we do not know exactly what it is (Dewey, 1938/2008, pp. 109–10).

As Günther Buck has described, in indeterminate situations we are in a state of "disquietude" (*Beunruhigung*) (1969, p. 72). Similarly, Richard Bernstein explained that in such situations there is "an immediacy, an awareness of a difficulty" (1966, p. 105). But importantly, this is an embodied awareness, not a purely cognitive recognition. Along these lines, Harriet Cuffaro points us to the fact that in indeterminate situations there is only "a sensing and feeling of unsettlement," but not yet a "problem, nor inquiry" (1995, p. 63).

Dewey also spoke of indeterminate situations as "disturbed situations," because our ordinary flow of experience has been "disturbed," in the sense of interrupted, by the unexpected response from the world (see e.g. 1933/2008, p. 200; 1938/2008, p. 109). When we are disturbed, we are no longer capable of following our familiar patterns of thinking and activity. In an indeterminate situation, the learner is merely held in the muddy waters of experience, where things are not yet clear because she is not sure how she got into the situation, nor indeed how to get out of it. Here, the learner finds herself in what I have called an "in-between realm of learning" (English, 2013, 2016a).⁴ In this "in-between," our uncertainty is *felt*, we are disquieted, but we have not yet reflected and inquired into the source of our feeling of uncertainty. Drawing on Käthe Meyer-Drawe, we can characterise this realm of being in-between within an indeterminate situation as a space in which the old "is no longer trusted" and, at the same time, the new "is not yet understood" (2005, p. 32, translation mine).

If common conceptions of learning tell us that learning is the "takeaway" of a process and not the process itself, then situations such as those described do not seem to be connected to learning at all, in fact, we might say they appear to be an absence of learning. Yet the state of existential uncertainty as a state of aporia that

⁴In my own work, I have delimited two realms of the in-between of learning, one is within the space of the indeterminate situation, the other occurs when we are within the space of what Dewey calls a "problematic situation" in which we have named what the problem is, but we do not yet know how to solve it, see English, 2013.

we find ourselves in within indeterminate situations has meaning for how we move forward. Thus, for Dewey, indeterminate situations, as those in which existential uncertainty emerges, are intimately tied to learning processes.

Indeterminate situations are educative because they make us aware of where we are within our own learning process at any given time by revealing what *was*, up to that point in time, in a certain sense *hidden* as merely a supposition in the form of a habit.⁵ In other words, in indeterminate situations, we become aware of the gaps in our learning, that is, we become aware that there is something that we do not yet know, cannot yet understand, cannot yet emotionally process, or that we are not yet able to do. As such, indeterminate situations can be conceived of as openings within our experience that make way for us to begin questioning our taken-for-granted ideas and habitual ways of being.

Uncertainty, Thinking and Freedom

For Dewey, the educative import of being in an indeterminate situation is that the existential uncertainty – that embodied feeling of being disturbed – initiates thinking: it “arouses inquiry” and “incites reflection” on the situation at hand (1933/2008, p. 193). Dewey underscored that although indeterminate situations are precognitive, because in them we have not yet begun to reflect on what happened to us, importantly, “they are the necessary condition of cognitive operations or inquiry” (Dewey, 1938/2008, p. 111). For Dewey, the existential uncertainty within indeterminate situations arouses thinking as an expression of freedom: moments of existential uncertainty that emerge within indeterminate situations cultivate the learner’s “freedom,” because they provide space for the learner’s original response.

Freedom, for Dewey, is understood as the “individuality” of the learner’s thinking within, response to and perspective on, the troublesome, indeterminate situation that the learner finds herself in (Dewey, 1916/2008, pp. 310–15). The individuality of each human being – each learner – becomes evident in how the learner responds to the situation with her own unique “point of view,” “appeal of objects” or “mode of attack” (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 312). This individuality is about the peculiarity of the “unforced” response to the given situation, what Dewey said is equivalent to “the originality of [the learner’s] attitude” and is not about the originality of the result or product (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 312). Indeterminate situations are situations that are unique to the learning being who is in interplay with the world, that is to say, they are indeterminate from “the standpoint of the learner,” even if the teacher knows exactly what is going on (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 312).

Looking back to Dewey’s example above, it is in that moment when the child wants to reach an object, but is not able to, that a question can arise in her mind as to *why* she cannot reach it. On that basis she can ask herself, what might I need in

⁵On this point, see Deborah Kerdeman, 2003.

terms of resources – for example, other objects, like a stick to nudge the reached-for object towards me, or, another person, such as a parent, to help me. These needs are not trivial. They point to precisely what *that* child in *that* moment *needs to learn*; moreover, they point to an opening for the learner’s imagination beyond *what is*, towards *what is possible*.

Though arriving in an indeterminate situation, on its own, is not the whole of learning, it marks an initial phase of what Dewey describes as a “reflective experience,” which is his term for how educative, transformative learning experiences unfold as processes involving reflection on the connection between what we “do,” and what we “undergo” in consequence (1916/2008, pp. 150–58).⁶ Such reflective inquiry turns our attention to examining the nature of our limit-experience – and the associated feelings of resistance and existential uncertainty – asking ourselves why we landed in the indeterminate situation and how we might get out. In this way, reflective thinking extends the meaning of the limit-experience for further thinking and action; although it begins in direct, urgent situations of indeterminacy, reflective thinking supports the growth of “social sympathies” by “widening our area of vision” to include “what lies beyond our *direct* interests” (Dewey, 1916, p. 155, emphasis in original; see also 1934, pp. 65–66). Thus, as the initial phase of learning, the indeterminate situation is critical as the source of freedom of thinking; it pushes the learner to “think for herself” – to think about her relation to the world and to imagine possibilities for alternative conditions that could come into play to change that relation.

As the source of freedom, the existential uncertainty emerging within the indeterminate situation is the source of a qualitatively different kind of problem than those “ready-made problems” handed down by a teacher in traditional schooling: existential uncertainty is the source of *learner-dependent* problems, which are problems for the learner *as a human being*. Such problems get formulated on the basis of learner’s reflection on her own limit-experience which arises from a particular kind of direct, lived interaction between self and world. This self-world interaction, as what Dewey calls growth, is not merely routine or mechanical, rather is experimental in so far as it has an element of the unexpected, new and different. Indeterminate situations suggest to the learner that there is a need to ask questions about the nature of her particular experience of self and world and their interconnection within that given moment in space and time. On the basis of such questioning, the need and desire to articulate a problem can emerge; the problems that are formulated in response to indeterminate situations are those that take account of, rather than ignore, the world and others with which we are engaged.

⁶The notion of reflective experience can be considered Dewey’s articulation of *Bildungsprozessen* [processes of *Bildung*]. I have discussed the notion of reflective experience as Dewey’s notion of learning at length elsewhere, see e.g. English, 2013, and specifically relating it to “productive struggle” (see English, 2013, 2016a and Murdoch et al., 2021). Dewey’s concept of educative experiences as “reflective” is importantly related to his notion of “aesthetic experiences” (on this point, see English & Doddington, 2019).

Uncertainty and Receptivity to Difference

With his description of the indeterminate situation and the associated human experience of existential uncertainty, Dewey points to the significance of receptivity to difference as part of what it means to be human. The difference, strangeness and newness that we encounter within our interactions with objects and other human beings can surprise us and make us wonder. To reflect on, and formulate, problems that take critical account for the difference we experience is to formulate a *human* problem, a problem for the learner as a human being. This act of reflection is an act of truly addressing our limitations; in this act, we are choosing to acknowledge our own incompleteness and our “plasticity,” that is, our human capacity to learn from the difference of the world and others.⁷

When learners are given opportunities to formulate problems on the basis of their own encounters with difference and their own sense of existential uncertainty that emerges from such encounters, then they learn that the *difference* of the world and others *matters* to who they are and who they become. They learn that the world and others affect how they think, judge, act, feel and exist in the world; they become aware of themselves as relational beings. For Dewey, such situations are at the heart of what fosters open-mindedness and intellectual growth:

intellectual growth means constant expansion of horizons and consequent formation of new purposes and new responses. These are impossible without an active disposition to welcome points of view hitherto alien; an active desire to entertain considerations which modify existing purposes. Retention of capacity to grow is the reward of such intellectual hospitality. The worst thing about stubbornness of mind, about prejudices, is that they arrest development; they shut the mind off from new stimuli (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 182).

Dewey’s idea of the indeterminate situation locates an educative space of human thinking as the exploration of newness, difference and otherness that arises via what I am calling a *non-affirmative* beginning of learning. Such a beginning is not imposed or forced onto the learner by a question with a predetermined answer from an external authority in the guise of “educator.” Rather, it is a beginning that is initiated within, and in light of, the learner’s particular way of interacting with the world and others – that is, within the learner’s process of growth or *Bildung*.

But this is not to say that the educator has no place in Dewey’s theory. In fact, the educator is given vital significance in supporting the learner’s transformative learning processes. For Dewey, the educator is not one who passes on pre-packaged

⁷Dewey’s notion of plasticity has roots in Rousseau’s idea in *Emile* (1964/1979) of *perfectibilité* (often translated as “perfectibility,” “educability,” or “plasticity”) used to refer to the human capacity to learn, that is, the capacity to take in something new and unexpected (a new idea, object, or interaction with another person) from one’s environment, to consider it, and to respond to it in light of one’s aims and desires, or, also, to reflectively change one’s given aims and desires on account of the new. Following Rousseau, Herbart (1835/1913, 1835/1902) referred to perfectibility [*Bildsamkeit*] of the individual as the “founding principle of education.” Dewey (1916/2008) later discussed human perfectibility, using the terms “educability” and “plasticity” to refer to the human “power of acquiring variable and novel modes of control” (p. 51). On this point, see English, 2013.

knowledge for learners to unquestioningly consume, but one who provides the conditions for learners' interactions with the world that expand their meaning horizons, as I discuss next.

Existential Uncertainty, Teaching and Democratic Education

Dewey's insights help to identify that in traditional, transmissive education, a specific hierarchical relationship is implied between the older and younger generation: the older generation has done the hard work of thinking, problem-finding, problem-solving and learning, and has established "certainties" for the younger generation to unquestioningly accept, that is, to affirm as true. However, Dewey was also critical of forms of education that claimed to be "progressive," yet understood learning to occur by "*just doing*," and, in turn understood teaching as allowing learners' activity for its own sake. Here, the learner is the sole determinant of the educational situation. Consequently, the teacher does not have the role of supporting the learner's reflection on the existential uncertainty emerging from what was done and undergone. As such, this "reductive-progressive" mode of teaching (as I refer to it) is a release from pedagogical responsibility. As J.-J. Rousseau (1764/1979) and J. F. Herbart (1806/1887, 1806/1902) have pointed out in different ways, such reductive teaching does not avoid building a hierarchical relationship between generations, rather it only establishes a different one: namely, one wherein the younger generation rules over the older.

Looking at the above two models of education, we can say that each model fails to make existential uncertainty meaningful for the learner's learning processes. On the transmissive model, it is not the role of the teacher to value the learner's existential uncertainty and hence it is not taken up by the teacher: it is not made relevant as a reference point for learner-generated questions, ideas, problems or solutions. This does not mean that in transmissive classrooms, learners do not *experience* existential uncertainty when they arrive at the limits of their own knowledge or ability. Naturally they do. We can imagine, for example, a learner may feel deeply unsettled as the term "half" gets repeatedly used by the teacher and peers in a mathematics lesson, because she does not understand the meaning of the word and thus cannot follow the lesson. Or, a learner may feel a nausea-like unease of not knowing how to pronounce a particular word when trying to read aloud in front of the class. In contrast, in reductive-progressive models of teaching, the teacher may initiate learners' direct interactions with objects and peers in the classroom learning environment that incite such unsettledness or unease. However, the teacher here does not see it as her role to support the learners' reflection on their feelings of uncertainty. Thus, the teacher misses opportunities to support learners to draw meaning from the limit-experiences that were the source of such uncertainty. Neither of these models foster an environment that supports existential uncertainty as an opportunity for thinking and growth—that is, an environment that cultivates indeterminate situations as educative realms of learning. Thus, both "traditional-transmissive" and

“reductive-progressive” classrooms leave it to chance as to whether the learner will face the discomfort, even fear, arising from existential uncertainty as a site for transformative learning, or whether the learner will instead decide to overlook or ignore uncertainty, retreating to situations of comfort without growth (English & Stengel, 2010; English, 2013).

Today, just as in Dewey’s time, both transmissive-traditional and reductive-progressive models of teaching pose critical threats to democratic education as a form of non-affirmative education. Dewey pointed out that at the heart of the problem with these models is that they each, in their own way, gravely misunderstand the principles of freedom and authority in education. In transmissive, affirmative teaching, the teacher *falsely* assumes that “an idea” can “be conveyed as an idea” directly from teacher to learner for learners to passively receive (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 166). Thus, transmissive teaching has no need to cultivate experiential processes in which learners are in a struggle, “wrestling with the conditions of the problem at first hand” in ways that incite reflective, critical thinking (Dewey, 1916/2008, pp. 166–67); instead such experiences are to be considered counterproductive to learning. In other words, the transmissive teacher does not see it as her role to support learners’ “productive struggle,” as I refer to it elsewhere (e.g. English, 2013, 2016a). On such a transmissive model, the teacher’s assumed authority over knowledge is translated in practice as authority over persons: authority manifests as external control of learners’ movement, such that discipline (or what today we call classroom management) is considered an essential means for social control of learners. The classroom is thus designed to enforce control of bodies as a means of controlling minds: learners sit in rows of desks for passive listening and conform to “a single mold of method of study and recitation” (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 312; see also Dewey, 1899/2008; Meyer, 2017).

Dewey’s considerations invite us to ask: What happens in such transmissive environments to *thinking* of the sort that is an expression of freedom, of individuality? His answer is that thinking it is not merely hindered, but “gradually destroyed”; the learner’s “confidence in his own quality of mental operation is undermined, and a docile subjection to the opinion of others is inculcated, or else ideas run wild” (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 312). What is cultivated is a form of parasitic dependence of one mind on another, namely the learner’s dependence on the educators as representatives of the existing order. The result of such teacher-learner interaction is “intellectual servility,” *the* form of mental life antithetical to democracy (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 315).

On the other hand, *reductive-progressive* forms of teaching understand “freedom” as a release from all external authority, leaving the learner at bay. This manifests in classrooms as merely freedom of movement. What is unattended to by the teacher is *genuine* freedom – the individuality of learners’ responses that needs to be supported by the teacher in order for lived experiences of uncertainty to become a source of active reflection and imagination of possibility. In failing to reflect on uncertainty, learners do not learn to detach themselves from their self-interested motivations for doing something in the world (e.g. grabbing an object).

Hence, in such reductive-progressive models, the learner does not learn to reflectively take in the response from the world; she does not learn receptivity to difference, taking differences in as valuable to further considerations of what can and should be done in the given situation. Instead, the learner may develop what is, as Dewey pointed out, a dangerous form of *independence*. Dewey warned that too strong a sense of personal independence “often makes an individual so insensitive in his relations to others as to develop an illusion of being really able to stand and act alone – an unnamed form of insanity which is responsible for a large part of the remedial suffering of the world” (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 49; see also D’agnese, 2017). Such insanity, characterising the narcissism of dictators, is seen today in the leadership of countries that still claim to be democratic. As such, reductive-progressive teaching can also be categorized as “affirmative,” albeit in a different sense than traditional-transmissive teaching: rather than affirming an existing order or a future order conceived of by the educators alone, reductive-progressive teaching “affirms” the learner, treating the learner as if he or she were without any need for an educator (i.e. as an autopoietic system).⁸

So, what does teaching look like that recognises and values freedom? One indispensable aspect of this that I argue is at the heart of Dewey’s unique contribution to the tradition of non-affirmative teaching, is that teaching must create opportunities for learners to land in indeterminate situations and experience existential uncertainty. Dewey was well aware that there is an inherent danger with any practice of teaching that proposes to initiate learner uncertainty, especially of the existential sort he described. There is a risk of overwhelming the learner, and thus leading her or him to disengage with the learning situation. In this vein, Dewey wrote, “not all difficulties call out thinking. Sometimes they overwhelm and submerge and discourage” (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 163). Teachers must deeply understand in theory, and be able to assess in practice, the differences between the types of situations and existential experiences of limitation that are productive – leading learners to engage in a productive struggle with the materials at hand – and those that are destructive – leading to suffering of the sort that hinders thinking, participation, relationality, receptivity and transformative learning (English, 2013; Murdoch et al., 2021).

Teacher as Artist

To truly nourish the mind-body complex, teachers must offer opportunities for learners to think – thinking that is genuinely tied to learners’ limit-experiences and the existential uncertainty that emerges. To do this, a different notion of the teacher must be embraced: the teacher is an artist, who creates “the conditions” which “will

⁸I use the term “affirmative” here with caution, noting that “affirming” every learner as a person with inherent worth is vital and necessary, and part of important discourses on rehumanising and decolonising education. I use the term here to add to the ongoing philosophical discourse on affirmative and non-affirmative education, as thematized in this volume.

enable” each learner to make his or her “own special contribution to a group interest” (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 310; 1924/2008, p. 180; English & Doddington, 2019). This is a dramatically different vision of who the teacher is, than those of affirmative forms of education.

Dewey uses metaphors of food and nourishment to illustrate a contrast between the teacher as artist and the teacher as transmitter. In transmissive teaching, the teacher is merely a cook who implements other people’s recipes with the aim of mechanical precision (Dewey, 1924/2008, p. 186). Following Dewey’s metaphor, we might say that in reductive-progressive teaching, the teacher asks the child to cook, but without supporting the child’s thinking through established ways.

The teacher as artist, however, is like the chef who designs the recipes for the cookbook (Dewey, 1924/2008, pp. 186). As artists, we could say teachers are also able to take up the “food” –that is, the new ideas that arise from their lived experiences with learners in classrooms– to creatively modify the recipe according to what the learners bring to the educational situation. These new ideas, this new “food,” from learners is produced when learners are given opportunities to engage in situations in which they can demonstrate “intellectual initiative, independence in observation, judicious invention, foresight of consequences, and ingenuity of adaptation to them” (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 312). In this way, they are given opportunities for freedom, for individuality – the personal contribution to their own learning (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 312). Rather than leading to docile dependence or radical independence, such opportunities can lead to learners’ development of *interdependence*, “vibrating sympathetically with the attitudes and doings of those about them” (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 48).

The teacher who is genuinely fostering such opportunities for learners is one who has the dispositions of “sensitivity” and “responsiveness” to learners’ expressed needs arising from their concrete interactions with new, unexpected and different objects and ideas (English & Doddington, 2019). As such, teaching is a reflective, educative process – rather than a mechanical, routine one or a mere observational one – by which the teacher also learns. Such teaching involves a skilled improvisational ability to be receptive to and responsive to the learners’ demands from the environment for the sake of aiding their continued development of, what Dewey calls, “reflective habits.” Reflective habits refer to the habit to reflect on one’s limit-experiences and the emerging uncertainty in the context of one’s ongoing search for meaning (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 162; English, 2013; English & Doddington, 2019). For the teacher this means having flexibility, or what Herbart (1802/1896) called “pedagogical tact,” drawing on Aristotle’s concept of *phronesis* (Aristotle, 2000). Sensitive and responsive teachers are able to see and hear “something fresh, something not capable of being fully anticipated” in the way each learner approaches and responds the subject matter, objects and ideas of others; such teachers are able to see and hear each learner’s expression of freedom (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 313).

If teachers are truly to be receptive to this freshness and newness that each learner brings, they must be prepared to experience their own discontinuities in teaching. That is, they must be prepared to arrive in indeterminate situations and experience existential uncertainty. These situations signal to teachers that they need to

reflect – they need to stop and rethink their point of view on who the learner is and how best to support *that* learner. Dewey writes that in this way teachers become an “intellectual companion” to learners (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 313). This role is one wherein the teacher has consciously chosen to be a co-creator in the making of the educational situation as a *necessary* condition for each learner *to become* a co-creator in its making. As a co-creator, the learner’s voice *emerges*, not as one that submits to existing learning situations, but as one that generates new learning situations based on vital experiences of indeterminacy that allow her to discover what she genuinely needs to learn and know.

Listening and Relationality: Towards Non-affirmative Democratic Education

Common understandings of teaching still rely on the idea that the teacher is someone who *tells*. Reading Dewey through the lens of the critical tradition of non-affirmative educational theory helps draw out what is implied by Dewey’s theory of democratic teaching, and yet goes beyond what Dewey himself articulated. Namely, this lens helps reframe the teacher as *one who listens*. On this view, non-affirmative teaching is fundamentally relational and receptive, though not passive. It is receptive to the experiences of learners, the genuine existential and reflective needs and questions that emerge from their limit-experiences, and the genuine, human problems that are generated by learners – not by teachers, textbooks or the system. As an intellectual companion, the teacher is one who actively creates opportunities to listen to learners’ ways of thinking, knowing and being so as to be able to support educational growth.

Transmissive, “affirmative” teaching as telling is still pervasive today, not just in schools, but also in tertiary education. Educational policies support this affirmative mode when they are grounded in views of high-quality education that equate quality with that which is quantitatively measurable, and in turn construct teacher accountability on the basis of student achievement on standardised tests (Apple, 2007; Au, 2010; Biesta, 2015; D’agnese, 2018; Stoltz & Webster, 2020). It is not merely that such policies do not account for what is educative about any given situation designed for learning and thinking, but rather it is that they actually *suppress it*. These policies serve to direct teachers’ attention away from students’ learning processes involving genuine individuality, and towards uniformity of thinking represented in standardised outcomes measured on assessments. They create environments in schools and communities where teachers are expected to close their eyes and shut their ears to learners’ expressions of uncertainty, confusion, doubt, frustration and the like. They foster deficit views of certain learners who do not conform, who cannot, or do not want to, reproduce *predigested* facts and figures, labelling them as those who do not “measure up.” While there has been important efforts in recent years to counter these teacher-centred, transmissive models, with educational

reforms pushing for student inquiry, learning through talk, or “active learning,”⁹ Dewey’s thinking reminds us of the need to ensure that these reforms are not in fact merely valuing reductive–progressive, and hence affirmative, teaching.

In affirmative education systems, it is not only the learner’s thinking, rather it is also the teacher’s thinking, that is shut down. The teacher is not supported to develop *individuality*, that is, originality of response that respects learners’ expressed needs. Neither the transmissive nor the reductive–progressive teacher is given the space and responsibility to think in ways that can foster creative support for learners to take up opportunities to inquire and cultivate new meaning on the basis of existential experiences of the world and others (Dewey, 1916/2008; 1923/2008, pp. 180–89).

One significant loss as a society that we endure through affirmative systems of education is *the loss of the teacher as a listener* – as one who listens deeply to and for the learner’s uncertainty and struggle, thinking, generative ideas, emotional needs, that is, one who listens to and for the learner’s whole being. Instead, we get either the transmissive teacher, who is a kind of mechanical listener, or the reductive–progressive teacher, who is a kind of pseudo-listener. As a mechanical listener, the teacher listens as if a machine programmed to listen evaluatively to whether students have right answers.¹⁰ This kind of mechanical listening reinforces what Fritz Oser and Maria Spychiger (2005) call the “Bermuda Triangle” of classroom interaction, whereby the teacher asks a question, then one student gives a wrong answer, the teacher moves to the next student, who gives the correct answer, after which the teacher moves on. The authors note that in such interactions no one actually learns, because the student who knew still knows, and the one who did not know does not understand why her answer was wrong (Oser & Spychiger, 2005, p. 163). In these situations, the teacher does not learn about her students’ ways of thinking and being, she does not gather any new “food for thought” from students to take forward in new creative, educational situations. Detrimentally, the transmissive “teacher as teller” and “student as passive listener” mutually reinforce and perpetuate one another: the teacher does not listen openly, but rather filters out anything new and fresh, and the students do not speak unless they have the right answer, and thus do not make known what is new and fresh in their minds.

Equally detrimental is any reform claiming to be in the progressive tradition and yet attempting to put the student in the role of talker or “teller” with the assumption that the teacher will automatically be a “listener.” Without a strong sense of relational, democratic teaching, in a non-affirmative sense, what in fact can occur with said reforms is that the teacher becomes a kind of pseudo-listener, that is, one who

⁹This term is now popular in tertiary education reform, with reports at times citing Dewey, see e.g. The European Parliament’s Report on Modernisation of Education in the EU (2018), chrome-extension://efaidnbmninnbpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2018-0173_EN.pdf; The Higher Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education report (2013), or the UK Advance HE’s 2008 guide on HE teaching, <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/active-learning-quick-guide>.

¹⁰On this idea of evaluative listening, see Davis (1996), who researched how mathematics teachers listen, and distinguished evaluative from interpretive and hermeneutic listening.

fails to have the discernment involved in listening in ways that productively support learners to extend their meaning horizons; the teacher is released from the pedagogical responsibility to listen in educative ways.

It has been recognised that the lack of genuine, open listening is contributing to the crisis in democracy (Dobson, 2014; Maccarone, 2022).¹¹ To avert this crisis, teachers, scholars, and citizens that intend to foster *non-affirmative*, democratic education, must deeply consider how such listening is learned. I contend that when teachers genuinely listen to learners' full experiences, including their uncertainty and struggle, learners learn to listen, however not as an act of obedience, but rather as an act of expressing the genuine desire to learn from their own uncertainty arising from that which they encounter as different and new.

Such pedagogical listening to and with learners is an intentional act of recognition of the learner as a human being in that it offers the learner the possibility to actualise the right to discover individuality, to discover freedom, to discover self and one's needs, including the deep need for others (Hintz et al., 2018).¹² In other words, the learner is given the possibility to discover what it means to be human. Thus, teacher listening is essential to democratic education as *non-affirmative* education, that is, education which is not understood as inculturation and socialisation into citizenship of a democracy as a pre-formed learner-independent political system, but rather is understood as a means of fostering democracy "as a way of life" (Dewey, 1916/2008, p. 93). Democracy, understood as a way of life, is a disposition towards reflection and growth through exchanges with human beings who have the option of seeing the world otherwise (English, 2013). To engage in this difficult work of deep receptivity through listening, teachers need the entire education system and all its players, including policymakers, teacher educators, school leadership and parents, to support them.

Given the vital role of existential uncertainty in learning as inciting thinking and initiating the formulation of genuine learner-*dependent* problems, it cannot be left to chance whether learners have opportunities to have educative experiences of existential uncertainty. The experience of existential uncertainty is the moment where

¹¹ Both Dobson and Maccarone are taking up Leonard Waks' (2007, 2010) concept of deeply open, empathic listening, which Waks calls "apophatic listening."

¹² In recent years, there has been an increase in research on listening that points to listening as central to education and human flourishing. There have been a few recent volumes in philosophy of education, including Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon and Megan Laverty's (2011) volume, which examines particular philosophers' notions of listening, including how it helps form educational relationships. Another is a volume of essays, edited by Leonard Waks (2015) which examines ideas of listening that inform well-known teaching approaches (for instance, Paolo Freire's critical pedagogy, or the Reggio Emilia approach). On listening in teaching, see, for example Katherine Schultz (2003); and Nicholas Burbules and Suzanne Rice (1991). Empirical research on listening has expanded in mathematics education, starting with Brent Davis' (1996) foundational study developing a framework for teacher listening, and further studies that have extended this study, e.g. Crespo (2000); Hintz and Tyson (2015). On the term "pedagogical listening" see Hintz et al., 2018; and English et al., (in review), which develops and applies a 'framework for pedagogical listening' that supports understanding how teachers listen while students verbalise struggle and uncertainty during mathematical discussion.

learners begin to feel “a sense of possibilities that are unrealized and that might be realized” (Dewey, 1934/2008, p. 349). By creating situations for indeterminacy and listening genuinely to learners’ needs that emerge – what they want and need to understand about self and other and the relation between the two – teachers can foster learners’ sense of possibilities and this can be a force for constructive social change:

These possibilities are, “when they are put in contrast with actual conditions, the most penetrating ‘criticism’ of the latter that can be made. It is by a sense of possibilities opening before us that we become aware of constrictions that hem us in and of burdens that oppress” (Dewey, 1934/2008, p. 349).

Many philosophers of education today, following Dewey and others in the critical pedagogy tradition, still envision classrooms as spaces where a sense of imagination and possibility can be cultivated. Classrooms can be spaces for cultivating what bell hooks refers to as “radical openness” (1994), or Maxine Greene calls “moral wide-awakeness” (1978), or what Leonard Waks (2010) calls “apophatic listening,” a deeply open, empathic listening. As we move further into the twenty-first century, it is urgent that we answer the call to rehumanise what have been dehumanising spaces of schools that have marginalised and silenced so many voices. To do this, I suggest that a critical question we need to ask is: How do teachers gain agency in systems that are telling them to view students as data points, as numbers, and not as human beings? Dewey’s insights, and more broadly the lens of critical non-affirmative educational theory, suggest that one starting point for teachers may be to identify just how, in the life of each classroom, the seed for situations of genuine indeterminacy can be planted and nourished.

Acknowledgements I want to thank the editor Michael Uljens and my colleague Leonard Waks for critical feedback on earlier drafts that has helped me improve the chapter. I also want to thank Duncan Pritchard and *The Centre for Knowledge, Technology and Society at University California, Irvine*, Michael Festl and *The John Dewey Centre Switzerland*, and Paul Standish, Judith Suissa and *The Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain* for opportunities to present this work. Finally, thanks to Dietrich Benner for two decades of conversations on this topic.

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Chapter 7

Forgotten Relations Between Justice and Education: A Non-affirmative Education Approach



Juan José Sosa Alonso

Abstract Today an instrumental perspective dominates the relation between justice and education (social justice through education). Such a view corresponds to an economist, utilitarian, neoliberal and performative interpretation of education and schooling. While a social justice perspective is valuable, it is limited. We need to broaden the view and aspirations of justice to include intrinsically educational aspects. Only when justice is linked to the ethical essence of the educational relationship, it is possible to contribute to generating just subjects for fairer societies. This argument is based on H. G. Gadamer's interpretation of the Platonic *Politeia* and M. Foucault's description of the ethics of self-care. Throughout, the chapter recognizes the value of D. Benner's model of non-affirmative education, grounded in his constitutive and regulative principles of education. This approach helps us to understand how pedagogical relations regarding problematisation and reflective dialogue operate in overcoming the injustice that modern, affirmative school models seem to carry with them.

Keywords Justice · Ethical education · Gadamer · Foucault · Social justice · Virtue · Non-affirmative theory of education

Introduction

The ideas of justice and education are as old as Western philosophy itself, and they went hand in hand for much of the journey that brings us to modern thought. This chapter will try to explain how, at some point, they broke ties with their original

Translated from Spanish into English by Antonio Jesús Sosa Alonso.

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© The Author(s) 2023
M. Uljens (ed.), *Non-affirmative Theory of Education and Bildung*,
Educational Governance Research 20,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30551-1_7

conceptions and gradually lost the connections that previously bound them together.

Starting from the observation of the pre-eminence of a distributive, instrumental perspective of the relationship between justice and education (social justice *through* education), the chapter aims to argue, based on the revision of the Platonic *Politeia* by Gadamer and Foucault, that we need to broaden and sharpen, the view towards intrinsically educational aspects (justice *in* education). These aspects point at the ethical essence of the educational relationship, as a formula capable of generating fair subjects for more fair societies.

In short, this chapter aims to lay the foundations for a broader, more complete, and more pedagogical approach to the idea of justice in education than the one currently in force. From this more “pedagogical” perspective, linked to the essence of what education *is* and *can be*, some relations are established with the historical-anthropological perspective of education developed by Dietrich Benner. Connections and links with the Non-affirmative Theory of Education are pointed out as one of the possible alternatives to overcome the reductionism with which we look at questions of justice in education.

Limitations of a Distributive Justice/Social Justice Perspective on Understanding Education

Nowadays, the question of “justice in education” is usually related to the problem of justice in school education. It is commonly approached under the labels of “equity” and “equality of opportunity,” as originally described by Coleman (1966). Following the view of Fernández Enguita (2006), the school is “invented,” as modern states are constituted, bringing with it a problem of submission of the educational practices that are developed in it to political and economic objectives that, in themselves, “overflow” and pervert the educational capacities that are supposed to be inherent to it.

The trouble arises with the emergence of the problem of “equality,” as Coleman reminds us, from the establishment of what we call “open societies” or modern societies. And, from that moment on, the school has been seen as a main tool, a “lever,” from which to contribute to that equality. Understanding justice in schools from such a *distributive perspective* is tantamount to restricting the interpretation of educational justice in schools to an instrumental perspective where we try to move towards social justice through activities in schools.

In this sense, and from the pedagogical-anthropological perspective of Benner (2015), we may claim that the school and its educational praxis has been subordinated to political and economic praxis. In other words, following this line of reasoning, modern conceptions of school education arise from the debate on, and attempt to answer, the question of *social justice* and the role of education in achieving it.

The idea of “social justice” is little more than 150 years old, and it is no exaggeration to say that the recent history of humanity has been marked by the struggle for its achievement. It is safe to claim that social justice is the underlying element of all public policies. Thus, for example, the Spanish philosopher Julián Marías (1974, p. 7) stated that “the 20th century would not be understandable without this term.” However, despite its importance and omnipresence, the concept of social justice itself is far from being a “self-evident” concept and requires clarification.

To clarify the concept of social justice, we carried out a search, or a kind of conceptual archaeological work, on the idea of social justice. This was complemented by looking into more exhaustive studies on the subject (e.g. Barry, 2005; Bierhoff et al., 1986; Brandt, 1962; Fleischacker, 2004; Fraser, 2008; Jackson, 2005; Miller, 1999; Raphael, 2001; Adams et al., 2016; Bell, 2016; Bogotch & Shields, 2014; Capeheart & Milovanovic, 2020; Conklin, 2014; Reisch, 2014; Sabbagh & Schmitt, 2016). Having done that work, the conclusion is that the models and theories of justice to be considered, from which to begin to construct a “discourse” on justice and equity in schools, should be nourished by the main contributions that have been made both from political philosophy and from the sociology of education.

In the latter, sociological perspective, what is found are abundant empirical studies, which point at, with the help of data, the persistent inequalities in education (e.g. in the Spanish context Bonal, 2003; Bonal & Scandurra, 2020; and in a more international perspective, Farrell, 2013), or those of the many supranational organisations (such as the World Bank, the OECD-PISA, UNESCO, etc.).

As a complement, or prior to them, there is work such as that of Hutmacher et al. (2002) or Teese et al. (2007) aimed at establishing and justifying the theoretical relevance of certain indicators in relation to equity in education. This line of work and analysis, fundamentally statistical and quantitative, is usually more typical of sociology and has its roots in functionalist, neo-Weberian and reproduction theorists (the work of P. Bordieu, Passeron and Bernstein is an obligatory reference here).

There is no lack of criticism of this type of analysis, which, at best, is only capable of providing “still photos,” and always “ex post” of the real situations experienced by those who suffer inequality. In addition, this research represents a gross simplification involved in reducing complex lives to “datasets” of variables (no matter how sophisticated these may be).

Generally, this line of work encounters difficulties when it attempts to go beyond the observation of inequality and inequity in education, in order to try to provide explanations. This research experiences even more problems when it attempts to offer proposals aimed at resolving the situation. The reason to this difficulty stems from that these approaches always assume an excessively externally determined perspective of the human being and thus restrict the space for education, starting from a denaturalised conception of what education *is* and *should be*. To express the dilemma with Benner’s notions: they ignore the constitutive and regulative principles of education (Benner, 2015, p. 61).

The other line of reflection on Social Justice, which emerges from the analysis carried out, from a political-philosophical perspective, we should consider the different conceptions and theories of social justice.

From this perspective, three major conceptions of social justice coexist today:

- Social Justice as Distribution, in which authors such as Rawls (1999, 2001), Martha Nussbaum (2007, 2011) and Amartya Sen (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993; Sen, 1992, 2009), among much others,¹ are obligatory references
- Social Justice as Recognition, whose analysis and description can be found above all in Collins (2019), Collins & Bilge (2016) and Fraser & Honneth (2004)
- and Social Justice as Participation, described mainly by Young (1990, 2000, 2011), Miller (1999) and, once again, by Fraser & Honneth (2004)

The first conception is centred on the distribution of goods, material and cultural resources or capabilities. The second one focuses on the recognition and cultural respect of every single person; on the existence of just relations within society, and the third conception is about participation in decisions that affect their own lives, ensuring that people can have an active and equal participation in society. Obviously, distribution, recognition and participation are not independent concepts, but share many of their approaches. Thus, for example, economic marginalisation is usually associated with classism, which is an example of material non-recognition; the same can be said of those who are discriminated because of ethnicity, gender, ability, or other cultural dimensions, who are more likely to suffer economic exploitation.

Martínez García (2017) clearly points out the limitation of distributive justice perspectives when trying to address the problem of equity in education. He states: “Distributive justice is adequate for thinking about equity issues related to how to distribute economic resources that improve education. But it is absurd to think that equity issues in education can be fully addressed with the tools of distributive justice” (2017, p. 128).

An example that Martínez García (2017) gives are the conclusions we arrive at when comparing from Finland and South Korea using social justice criteria. If we compare Finland and South-Korea, we can see that both countries share the merit of being among the countries whose students seem to perform at the highest level in international tests. Moreover, these two countries share similar levels of *equity* (OECD, 2018). In other words, the *distributional* effects of educational achievement are very similar between the two countries. Therefore, in terms of distributive justice or so-called *justice through education*, the two countries appear comparable.

However, it is when we analyse the type of education, the conceptions, values and aims that animate the education practised in both countries that we can see the

¹An exhaustive list of all the authors and theoretical models that have been developed under the category of distributive justice would be endless. They should be presented, moreover, minimally organised into the different currents or theoretical approaches from which they have been developed. Thus, in a liberal justice perspective (justice understood as “right”), in addition to those already mentioned by Rawls, we could cite those of Nozick (1974), Dworkin (1977, 1985) or Cohen (1993) and, in a more communitarian perspective (justice as a virtue, linked to the idea of “good”), the works of Taylor (1986, 1995), Sandel (1998, 2009) or Walzer (1983, 1986), and, from another, more conservative perspective, the works of Alasdair MacIntyre (2007). All this should be the subject of a specific presentation that goes beyond the scope of this chapter.

importance of the alternative analysis we are advocating here related to justice in education. While Finland as a whole pursues the development of democratic citizenship values as *the main value*, to which all other competences and skills are subjected, in South Korea, the educational model seems to be more guided by individual excellence, understood as high performance in the most academically relevant subjects. This is what some authors, such as Martínez García, have described as “educational fever” defined as “an unbearable pressure on students to improve their performance, extending the school day with private classes” (2017, p. 146).

It is quite revealing, for example, that there is a difference between the strategies proposed in the two countries for improving school performance in science (OECD, 2018, pp. 129–131). While Finland seems to favour adaptive teaching and direct instruction, together with the provision of specific educational resources, South Korea stands out for promoting more of a disciplinary climate in science classes, as well as the promotion of school competitions and the creation of “science clubs” (which seems to be rewarding excellence and competitiveness).²

It is clear that even in such a general analysis as this, apart from distributive equality, the implications in terms of respect for autonomy, emancipation or the primacy of education over other considerations are very different in the two countries.

To conclude this section, understanding justice from a mainly distributive perspective on justice is tantamount to reducing education in schools to having an instrumental role: in essence, the aim is to try to move towards social justice through school action. Through this way, I consider that a door is also opened to utilitarian, neoliberal and performative interpretations of school and education, as Uljens & Yilmaki (2017) have also pointed out recently.³

Moving Beyond a Distributive Justice Perspective on Education

It should be observed that the previous critique of distributive justice in education does not deny the importance of advancing towards greater levels of equality and social justice, and I am very aware of the transcendental role that schools play in this.

²All this is reflected, in our view, in the different assessments that the OECD itself recognises, between Finland and South Korea, in terms of what it calls equity in student’s “well-being” (in this case, markedly higher in Finland) (OECD, 2018).

³We believe that this utilitarian and instrumental position of education (*put at the service of*) is a consequence of the hegemony of Cultural Capital Theory, a theory as pervasive as it is criticised (Tan, 2014), as well as the very fact that education has traditionally been seen as a “field of study” dependent on other disciplines, as Uljens & Yilmaki (2017, pp. 77–78) well describe.

Even if one takes a socio-utilitarian position, the fact that schools are inherently unjust and that advances in terms of distributive justice have only served to distribute an “alienating” education more equally could be seen as a minor or secondary problem. After all, if the promotion of social equality is ensured (and if it is done with mechanisms that are fair, in terms of distribution, recognition and participation), a great deal of progress is already being made. This approach is undoubtedly correct. However, underlying this problem, the type of education practised, the educational objectives pursued, and the role of the subject being educated cannot be neglected.

The ultimate aim of the concern for justice in education is to achieve a fairer, more egalitarian social *ethos*, that is, to help move towards societies to become globally fairer. One of the ways, but only one, of achieving this is through education, introducing criteria of *distributive and social justice*. This means to share knowledge and promote educational equality, contributes to equality, to equity, to developing relations of solidarity and of excellence, which also contributes in general to promoting the well-being of citizens and the societies in which they live. This is indisputably important.

But, we believe that there is another way of understanding justice and its relationship to education that goes beyond the purely distributive (and therefore instrumental) issues of education. Already Plato did identify and clarify an alternative view, a view we will try to re-explain or reintroduce into the scheme of analysis of justice, through the perspectives and interpretations of the original Platonic approaches, on the one hand, by Hans Georg Gadamer and, on the other, by Michel Foucault.

We think that the other fundamental *leg* of justice in education, which we also consider the fundamental and truly educational one, is based on the type of pedagogical relations occurring between educator and student. Depending on the nature of these pedagogical relations, we can then understand how *another form of justice* appears, which is related to the very *act* of education and with the *way* it is done.

We refer to a form of justice that authors such as Robert McClintock (2019) have called *formative justice*. This leads to what would no longer be equality, equity, solidarity and excellence, that are the criteria of distributive justice, but to the *development of the person*, to the constitution of the individual in itself, let us say, with the *formation of the subject*. Ultimately, what all this does is define a *just subject*. This set of ideas reminds us of the need for an *ethical or moral education* which would be, in our view, a necessary complement to and requirement of social justice so that we can really move towards a fairer and more egalitarian social *ethos*.

Our main thesis is, therefore, that if we do not address the issue of the justice of the educational-pedagogical relations practised in schools, the school cannot become a *just* institution, nor can it contribute to the development of more just societies. It is not enough to look at the effects of the school, in terms of social results or in terms of indicators of social equality *during* or *after passing through* the school. Rather, it is also necessary to pay attention to the internal, essential, main

analysis of *whether the education that is promoted in schools is just, in the original sense of the term.*

It is this idea that we try to argue for by attempting to recover some of Plato's ideas interpreted through Gadamer and Foucault. Before doing so, however, we must take the time to briefly analyse the *original concept of justice.*

The Original Concept of Justice

The idea of justice is a human problem. No animal wonders about the "justice" of its actions. It is consubstantial and exclusive to our human nature. In other words, the idea of justice has always accompanied human beings, even before we had a more or less elaborated conceptualisation of it.

This idea, that of the consubstantiality of justice to human nature, can be found, for example, in the account given by the Platonic *Protagoras*, in a debate with Socrates. The object of this dialogue (Protagoras) is precisely to reflect on whether virtue (justice) is teachable or not. In this framework of reflection, the sophist resorts to *Hesiod's Theogony*⁴ as an argument in favour of the teachable nature of the human being, in all dimensions, including virtue.

What is important to note about this myth is that for the fullness of the human being it was not enough to have certain manual skills or a certain "technical or manual wisdom" (what we could call the "Promethean nature"). Instead, what really makes us human is the "gift" of justice (which allows us to decide on right and wrong) and, in addition, modesty (or moral sense), which forces us to review ourselves and to adjust our behaviour as moral subjects.

But the myth and the dialogue also contain another message: this possibility of *conscience* (which defines the sense of justice and modesty), inherent to our human condition, does not appear as the result of an automatism, but must be developed, and education plays an essential role in this (Protagoras, 323c).

Starting from this myth, the question that underlies all this Platonic dialogue is that establishing this "conscience," nourished by the sense of justice (*diké*), is the true object of education. The idea of *justice (diakosyné)* evolved from the original idea of justice, the *diké*, which was an expression of order in the cosmos, and was projected from the cosmos towards the subject. Later, with Socrates, a different idea of justice appeared: the idea of justice derived from himself.

⁴*Hesiod's Theogony* divides the creation of man into three phases: Epimethean, Promethean and that of Zeus himself. The brothers Epimetheus and Prometheus were commissioned by Zeus to distribute the various gifts among the animals of creation in order to ensure their survival. The problem arises when Epimetheus (a little reckless) distributes the available gifts and qualities, forgetting the human being. Prometheus tried to correct his brother's mistake by endowing the human species with manual skills (today we would call this maybe "professional wisdom") and fire stolen from the gods, and finally Zeus made humans capable of survival by giving them a sense of justice (*diké*) and modesty (*eidós*) (this can be read in Protagoras dialog, lines 320c–323a).

With Socrates, the human being becomes the source from which the idea of Justice emanates. Justice became the result of the intimate convictions, that tells the human being, the bearer of these convictions, what is *just* and what is *unjust*. Justice is that which derives from his soul, which is the idea that Plato later took up and synthesised in the phrase that *what is just is above all the virtue of the soul*.

With this affirmation, the Platonic intuition points to the need to transcend the merely relational questions of justice, to add a quality, proper, internal to the “just” subject that confers, from the point of view of pedagogical theorisation and the processes of subjectivation, an unquestionable importance to its approach to justice. As Annas (1981, p.12) stated: “Plato makes justice more important than we might expect, and his theory of justice has a much wider scope than some.”

This idea of justice as something interior has to do with the idea of virtue. It is later taken up by Aristotle and transformed and developed in a broader way, generating a whole theory of justice that tries to integrate a general perspective and a particular perspective of justice. Aristotle’s theory of justice starts from the idea of universal justice that would embrace the idea of Platonic virtue and then describes a series of particular modalities of justice that have a relational character. What Aristotle is presenting here are the two perspectives of justice that we introduced earlier: social justice, which is of a relational character, and universal justice, that is general and shared but internal to the subject, understood as virtue.

It is important to highlight that Aristotle’s differentiation is of the utmost interest for everything that has to do with theorising justice. This is especially true from the perspective of social justice as related to the constitution of modern states under the rule of law. It could be said Aristotle’s distinction served to “cover up” in some way the importance of the other justice, the general justice, the virtue, which was taken for granted.

Centuries later, with the constitution of modern societies, when we began to worry about equality, the concern for justice was recovered, but the predominant discourse was that of particular, relational or distributive justice. We were unable to realise the importance of the prior view, which is *justice understood as education for virtue*. With that, the educational connections to the idea of justice were lost. It is to explain this ¿idea? that it may be useful and convenient to recover some *forgotten relations between justice and education*.

The Forgotten Relations Between Justice and Education

As a matter of fact, today we typically do not consider virtue as an issue related to justice, but to other types of issues in education: quality education, good education, education in values, etc. In this section, I try to explain justice as *education for virtue*. To this end, we must refer back to the original, Platonic idea of justice.

When turning to the subject of justice and education in Plato who, as said, is the one who, in the first place, raised the issue of the relationship between justice and education understood as the development of virtue, Gadamer’s works are valuable.

Hans-Georg Gadamer analyses the dialogue *Republic* in two of his works: *Plato und die Dichter*, that appeared in 1934 (Gadamer, 1934) and *Platos Staat der Erziehung*, published in 1942 (Gadamer, 1985).

In *Plato und die Dichter*, Gadamer attempts to interpret Plato's criticism of poetry and poets in the *Republic*. Gadamer argues that this rejection has no meaning in relation to the value of poetry *per se* (it seems that Plato himself in his youth pretended to be a poet). Gadamer says that this rejection should rather be interpreted in terms of the object of his reflection in *Republic*, which is the question of education for the development of citizens with a sense of justice compatible with the proper development of political and social harmony in the polis. Gadamer argues that *Republic* has sometimes been interpreted as a fully-fledged political project, but it is not.

Plato does not intend to offer a political program for the constitution of a genuine state, but refers to *a state in thought, not on earth*: "ein "Urbild im Himmel" für den, der sich selbst und seine innere Verfassung ordnen will" in the original text of Gadamer (1934, p. 14). The true scope of the reflections on the education and government of philosophers in *Republic* must be interpreted in terms of "an archetype in heaven for those who wish to order themselves and their inner condition." This interpretation of *Republic*, in which the state (the polis) is only a model from which to inquire into "internal" justice, is also defended by Annas (1981) and by Foucault (2005). In essence, therefore, what we are talking about here is subjectivation, formation (Bildung) and education in relation to justice.

For Gadamer, Plato, with his criticism of the poets, who represented "the curriculum" of his time (del Valle, 2000), intended to denounce the fact that the sophistic educational model had led to the inadequate development of virtue. This is what leads Plato (the Platonic Socrates) to recall the true excellences of "the just" (Gadamer, 1934, p. 16, translation is ours):

[...] justice is not the right that each one has against the other, but a just being of each one with himself and with all the others; that justice is not the situation in which each one watches over all others, but that in which each one watches over himself and watches over the just being of his inner disposition.

In other words, justice would be the ethical self-construction of the citizen. This is the key idea that we are trying to rescue for our argument. Justice in education is not, and cannot be, only a question of distributive justice, referring how much education we distribute to each and what effects it has on us, but must also contemplate the idea of how to be just with oneself, in the process of one's formation.

Justice in education, therefore, from this perspective, is to answer the question: *what do I do with myself?* Or, to put it another way: justice in education begins by contributing to the development of just educational practices, aimed at developing well-ordered people in their inner disposition.

Gadamer's work *Plato und die Dichter* was followed up in 1942 by *Platos Staat der Erziehung* (Gadamer, 1985). In this work, the discussion of sophistic and traditional approaches to justice is revived. The central notion of this text by Gadamer, redundant with the one already anticipated in *Plato und die Dichter*, is that of justice

(*dikaiosýne*), understood as the primary political virtue and the foundation of the community.

In this sense, justice consists in the correct civic mode of being, that could be accessed through education. Gadamer affirms that for Plato Justice is not only foundation, faculty, and virtue, but also “the aim of all education” (Gadamer, 1985, p. 252). It is a certain kind of knowledge that demands from the soul the effort to attain a vision of the community, of that that is common and of the idea of the good.

The Platonic justice, for Gadamer, is not a moral but a political virtue, a certain kind of practical knowledge, that education makes possible, but which paradoxically is not and cannot be taught, but achieved in community, in dialogue and by recognition of the injustice already existing in the polis. According to Gadamer, the great Platonic audacity lies in positing that education is not only the means to unveil the absence of justice, but the prerequisite for “attaining and preserving it” (Gadamer, 1985, p. 252).

Synthesising what Gadamer has said in the two works of reference, we find five fundamental ideas. The first is that just education cannot be based solely on utilitarian or distributive approaches, it transcends relational justice. The second idea is that just education in the original sense of the term is that which allows the subject to constitute himself as a moral subject. The third idea that Gadamer puts forward is that a just education and the development of just citizens can only be achieved with an educational scheme based on dialogue that promotes the work of each one on oneself: “the care of oneself” that leads to the establishment of one’s own morality but connected to the care of those of others.⁵

The fourth idea is that education for justice (for virtue) would be something totally different from a “fantastic and powerful *psychagogy*⁶ directed towards a predetermined aim or goal”⁷ (Gadamer, 1934, p. 17).

⁵When we speak of self-care, we must be very observant because the expression could make us think that what we are talking about is of the constitution of *selfish* individuals. Instead, self-care is what allows us to become an entity capable of caring for others, which is the ultimate goal of all this: the common good (cf. Ball, 2017, pp. 75–85).

⁶The expression *psychagogy* appears in different dialogues, such as *Phaedro*, *Gorgias* or *Republic*, and it has been cited and described by many authors who deal with the subject (Ball, 2013, 2017; Foucault, 2005, 2010; Fuentes Megías, 2017, 2020; Gadamer, 1934; Infinito, 2003; Levinas, 1991; Mensa Valls, 2014). It refers to a way of leading the reflection of the people who listen to you and your speech. It literally means “to lead the speech through the souls” or “to lead the speech through thought.” *Psychagogy* is only an instrument, a technique, which, depending on who uses it, can serve for indoctrination, it can serve for demagogy, or it can serve for true education: the *parrhesia* (Ball, 2013; Foucault, 1983, 2010).

⁷The expression “directed towards a predetermined goal” should not go unnoticed either, which implicitly seems to point to the illicitness and injustice of an education that contemplates the achievement of educational objectives (formative of the individual) extrinsic to those that arise from the formation process itself, as a consequence of the pedagogical relationship itself. The problem, therefore, would not so much be *psychagogy*, but rather the violation of the principle of self-determination or autonomy of the subject.

In contrast to the idea of *rhetoric psychagogy*, education instead consists precisely in a new experience of justice arising from the *critical questioning of inherited morals and customs*. In no case can education be expected to be the product of an authoritarian education, imposed from the power of an educational organisation (identified by Plato in the dominant sophist education). Education comes to life only through questioning and interrogation (what we could describe as “work of oneself, on oneself”).⁸

So, what Gadamer denies is the possibility that we can serve true education through a rhetorical *psychagogy* (what Ball, 2017, calls “a simple pedagogy”). We will come back to this later.

The fifth fundamental idea is that it is not possible to care for others, to relate justly to others, if we have not first taken care of ourselves, and *that requires self-care*. Therefore, inner justice, virtue, requires *care for oneself*, through an educational relationship of a dialogical nature, not imposed, not curricularised “a priori,” which clearly questions the current school model. And yet, the school model that we have, and which is hardly questioned, is precisely the one that seems to be contrary to what is needed for “just education.”

All those ideas that are implicit in Plato and that Gadamer synthesises in these two works are telling us about a conception of education that has little to do with the conception of education that we have today, as something based precisely on a mere transmission of knowledge and values of a more technical than ethical nature. How did we come to this? In order to find out how we forgot about the ethics of self-care, we will turn to Michel Foucault.

Emergence and Decline of the Ethics of Self-Care: The Triumph of the “Great Didactic”

Michel Foucault, in his *Hermeneutics of the Subject* (Foucault, 2005), which is the course he taught in the academic year 1981/82 at the Collège de France, provides us with one of the best synthesisations regarding the *ethics of self-care*, that gave rise to all the Platonic discourse that appears in *Republic*.

According to Foucault, this ethics of self-care, the principle of taking care of oneself (the *epimeleia heautou*), appears in the fifth century B.C. It runs through Hellenistic Greek and Roman philosophy as well as Christian spirituality until the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. Gradually it was reconverted and reinterpreted, until it was understood in a completely different way. Following Foucault, the process by which the original *ethic of self-care* was eventually transmuted into the much less ambitious and devalued idea of “know thyself” occurred in three stages:

⁸In this way, the connections with one of the central ideas of non-affirmative education, understood as the induction to the problematisation of inherited cultural contents (in its broadest sense), seeking the learner’s own positioning, with the support and help of the teacher, are evident.

1. The Platonic Socratic moment, which is the one to which we are going to devote a little more time now through the analysis of the dialogue *Alcibiades* presented by Foucault
2. A second period, which is what he calls the *golden age* period of the culture of self-cultivation around the first and second centuries A.D.
3. A third period which is the transition in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. from pagan asceticism and philosophical asceticism to Christian asceticism

So, as noted above, this first period, which is that of the constitution of the ethics of self-care, is described according to Foucault, in the dialogue *Alcibiades*. In *Alcibiades*, we can find a reflexive movement that, in a way, lays the foundations of what we are interested in highlighting here. The first idea is that we have a young man (Alcibiades) who wants to rule others, he wants to be the leader of his polis and Socrates makes him understand that he is not ready because he is ignorant. Then Alcibiades laments and Socrates tells him not to worry, because he is ignorant but that he has time. He has time but, *for what?* Socrates' answer is very revealing: he has time *not to learn, but to take care of himself*, and this is where Plato introduces, according to Foucault, an important difference between *learning* and *taking care of oneself*, that we must bear in mind.

In other words, *self-care* is not a mere accumulation of knowledge that we could identify with sophist education, but what is actually implicit in it is something more.

That “something more” is what Foucault calls *the spiritual dimension of education*, which for Plato was considered fundamental; the basis and aim of education. Foucault explains what he means by spirituality in the following way: “By spirituality, I understand [...] that which precisely refers to a subject acceding to a certain mode of being and to the transformations which the subject must make of himself in order to accede to this mode of being” (Fornet-Betancourt et al., 1987, p. 125).⁹

It is this spiritual dimension that ends up implying a real transformation, a transfiguration of the learner *as a consequence of reflection and questioning*. The transformation operates through *the work of oneself upon oneself*. It is a consequence and a requirement of true learning.

What this means is very well described by Ball (2017, pp. 75–85), through what he calls *pedagogical parrhesia*, which refers to the idea of ethical education. In other words, in order to arrive at truth, at true knowledge (which is the object of true education), the cognising subject, through the experience of knowing, must somehow be transformed into something else. In this process, Foucault reminds us the figure of the teacher is a fundamental, but not for teaching as transmitting knowledge or values (teacher's values), but to induce, to ensure that the learner takes care of himself. It is not a question of “educating” them, where teacher is assumed the leading role and, in some way, being solely responsible for the education of the others. No, what the teacher must do is *to be there* to remind the one who has to be

⁹It is inevitable to recall the *Geistesbildung* of which Herbart spoke in the context of the relevance that the aesthetic intuition acquires for the moral and ethical formation of human beings (Benner, 1993).

educated of the need to do so, to remind to take care of him/herself, in an ethical relationship oriented towards ethical development.

The final idea in *Alcibiades*, perhaps the most important, among those highlighted by Foucault, is the one that occurs at the end of Alcibiades' dialogue. It concludes with the following idea: *to take care of oneself is to take care of justice understood as virtue; that is,...in the end the final result of taking care of oneself, of education, is going to be inner justice, virtue and this is the requirement to be able to govern others with justice, that is to say, for social justice* (Foucault, 2005, pp. 71–72).¹⁰

A brief digression is made here to point out that what emerges from a reading of Gadamer's and Foucault's texts is a confluence of interpretations and conclusions that is most surprising. These two authors who do not quote each other, who seem to carry out a totally independent investigation and reflection, who are also experts in Plato's work and have a great capacity to interpret it, still end up arriving, each from different starting points and reading different dialogues (one *Republic* and the other *Alcibiades*), at practically the same conclusions.

Now, turning to Foucault and his development of what happened with the "ethics of self-care," Foucault describes how this ethic of self-care is transmuted over time. It acquires a series of connotations that cause it to fall into a kind of decline, especially since the advent of Christian ethics, which introduces the idea of detachment from the self, so that the idea of self-care does not fit very well into this new ethos. This transmutation leads us subsequently to what Foucault calls the *Cartesian moment*. At this moment, the history of truth and the process of truth enters what we could call the modern period. The idea that triumphs at this point is that what gives access to truth, the conditions according to which the subject can have access to truth, is knowledge and only knowledge. In this view, there is no need for what Foucault called *spirituality*, the transformation of the cognising subject.

In other words, the idea imposed is that access to truth only requires simple recognition of the "truth" by a subject, without the need for any transformation on his or her part. This is what leads Foucault to the statement that "the modern age of the relations between the subject and truth begin when it is postulated that, such as he is, the subject is capable of truth, but that, such as it is, the truth cannot save the subject" (Foucault, 2005, p. 19).

It is in this moment that Foucault identifies as important when the spiritual dimension of education is somehow lost. More precisely, this moment is the culmination of a process that had been going on before since the Stoics and before that with Aristotle. Even Platonism itself implicitly carried the idea of the rationalisation of the processes of knowing and, paradoxically, with it also its own erasure. In any case, from the seventeenth century onwards the Cartesian moment indicates the development of a new way of understanding the relations between the knowing

¹⁰This idea has also been put forward by Foucault as follows: "I think that the assumption of all this morality was that the one who cared for himself correctly found himself, by that very fact, in a measure to behave correctly in relationship to others and for others" (Fornet-Betancourt et al., 1987, p. 118)..

subject and knowledge, which, in turn, leads us to a rationally oriented way of understanding the processes of subjectivation.¹¹ This, subsequently, opens the door to devaluing ways of understanding education.

From the seventeenth century, the importance given to the educational relationship based on inducing self-care, which is much broader, much more complex, much more sophisticated, and a relationship in which the teacher is developing a relationship of an ethical nature, was lost.¹² This was substituted by approaches that Ball (2017, reading Foucault) calls more “simple pedagogical” and a kind of “non-education” which McClintock (2019) identified and represented in the approaches of Comenius (and other methodologists that emerged around the seventeenth century) who go on to interpret education as a mere question of *teaching technique*.

Since the seventeenth century, the “Great Didactic” was the mother of all pedagogical prescription. It would be enough to read Comenius’ presentation of his *Didactica Magna* to understand the simplification of the approach:

The whole art of teaching all things to all [people], that all youth of both sexes, without exception, may become quickly, agreeably, and thoroughly learned in the sciences, pure in morals, trained in piety, and thus instructed in all things necessary for the present and future life,, an easy and safe method is shown, by which it may be brought agreeably into existence. (Comenio, 1998; translation is ours)

Of course, it is not intended to affirm that Comenius is solely responsible. Many factors contributed to the creation of modern schools with the model of the *Didactica Magna* as the main referent.

We believe it was in the process of shaping modern societies, that is, when the problem of equality starts to become important and where mass education had to be provided, that the Cartesian approach that knowledge existed as external and independent of the subject, conceived as if it were a “quasi-material” entity that could be distributed, fitted very well with Comenius’ approach that education is easily distributable with a mere technique.

The educational implication of the separation between “knowledge as external” and “the cognising subject” is that the only task for the teacher is to establish, by means of an adequate technique, some procedure by which the subject can acquire knowledge without having to go into problems of transformation, transmutation, transfiguration, etc. That is to say, from an educational point of view, the “Cartesian moment” was introduced through a symbiotic association with the educational conceptions that can be traced in Comenius’ didactics, which provided the ideal educational *form*, the *technique* to do so.

¹¹ Benner & Stepkowski (2012) provides an interesting analysis of this process, focusing on the various interpretations given to Plato’s metaphor of the cave. Also Mollenhauer (1987) writes about the conflicting development of the processes of subjectivation since modernity, with its detractors and defenders, and asks whether corrections to the concept of *Bildung* should be introduced.

¹² I think that a good description of what an alternative approach to education that preserves the “spirituality” described by Foucault implies can be found in Chap. 3 of this book, signed by Thomas Rucker, when he refers to “educative teaching.”

Fernando Bárcena (2012) describes the kind of education that emerges from such educational conceptions based on the premise of the learner as a precarious, lacking and incomplete subject as a kind of “pedagogical imposture.” Jacques Rancière (1991) alludes to the same idea, describing such education as being “based on explanatory logic” which always implies an “affirmative” perspective on education.

For Lévinas (1991) too, the idea of teaching that begins to become generalised from this type of approach and which ends up in giving rise to modern school systems carries the germ of injustice with it.¹³ The instrumental view corrupts the freedom of the pupil by not approaching the other person head-on but obliquely; it is violence par excellence and therefore injustice.

Lévinas says, literally, in *Totality and Infinity* (1991, pp. 70–72) that “to renounce the psychagogy, demagogy, pedagogy rhetoric involves is to face the Other, in a veritable conversation. [...] We call justice this face-to-face approach, in conversation. [...] And in this sense justice coincides with the overcoming of rhetoric.”

Certainly, the rationality introduced by *Didactica Magna* is important and will not disappear. But we must rethink our understanding of what education is and the act of educating, avoiding the possible injustice (in the sense that we have been discussing it) that it could entail.

According to Stephen Ball (2017), the alternative to both the “non-education” that arises with modernity and the denial of the existence of a “true pedagogy” in what we call “schooling,” is to reclaim the basic idea that education is only education if it is education for freedom. However, the model of schooling that emerges in Modern States, aligned with Social Justice (generally understood as a meritocratic distribution of equal opportunities) we believe is *not* a path of freedom but one of domination and submission and, therefore, of injustice.

Instead, as Ball, interpreting Foucault (1987), states “the ‘proper task’ of education is: ‘to define the conditions in which human beings ‘problematise’ what they are, what they do, and the world they live in” (Ball, 2017, p. 79). Such an ambition represents, in our opinion, a possibility to a more “just” education, in the original and full sense of the idea of justice.

At this point, we consider that we can find a way beyond a limited, distributive justice perspective in education, applying the powerful and purely pedagogical argumentation found in Benner’s historical-anthropological foundation of educational praxis and its constitutive and regulative principles. Indeed, when Benner explores the context of the discovery of constitutive principles, he reminds that these are closely connected with the emergence of the problem of social freedom and equality in modernity (Benner, 2015, p. 65; translation is ours):

The conceptual formulation of the constitutive principles of pedagogical thought and action, which will now be discussed, is inseparably bound to the modern idea that man finds and gains his destiny through education. It is not a discovery of individuals, but a historical

¹³It is important to clarify that we rely on Lévinas simply as another argument in favour of the inadequacy, from the point of view of justice, of a pedagogy understood under the model of a rhetorical *psychagogy*. We do not intend, with this, to validate the whole discourse of ethical construction of the individual that he defends.

experience that only became possible in the context of the emergence of modern bourgeois society and is closely related to the modern question of freedom and equality.

Thus, it clearly links the problem of the modern interpretation of educational processes to the core problems of social justice: freedom and equality. By this more pedagogical (non-affirmative) way, we can perhaps find an alternative educational conception, more educational and fairer, in the original and genuine sense of these two terms.

The Non-affirmative Education as an Alternative Way to Justice in Education

In order to connect the described discourse, based on the relations of justice education in the perspective of Gadamer and, above all, of Foucault, with the contributions made from the non-affirmative theory of education, we will begin by drawing on the work of Justen Infinito (2003), entitled *Ethical self-formation: A look at the later Foucault*. This work is interesting because it solves the problem that, although Foucault, in his discourse, offers perspectives and approaches of great educational significance, he never manages to make a direct approach to pedagogical or educational issues. Infinito does this interpretative work, drawing some ideas and conclusions.

A quote from Infinito's work, particularly revealing for the next step of my argumentation is:

We remain always in the world – we take it as a “given” but that does not mean that we “give in” to it. [...] The connection to the present is not lost, but it does not turn into a conservative desire to hold on to it. Our cultivated awareness keeps us rooted in our contingency from which ethical action – that is, acting in the world without “totalizing” – is possible. (Infinito, 2003, p. 169)

Implicit in this quotation is both the essence of the problem of the transition from teleologically determined educational models (typical of pre-modern societies) to the educational complexity of the advent of modern societies, and the educational paradox that this entails.

Indeed, with modernity, it was no longer possible to continue thinking of human education as an orientation towards a determined morality, but it became necessary to conceive it as a reflection on the very fact of morality and to enable, in the processes of subjectivation, each subject to develop his or her own morality, freely. And, in this space, what is understood as the fundamental paradox of modern education emerges: how to “influence” the formation of the individual while respecting his autonomy and orienting him towards a future that appears to us as uncertain and undetermined.

The solution to this paradox, implicit in Infinito's quotation (which, I insist, attempts to make a reading of Foucauldian discourse in an educational key) is very similar to the one described, among others, in Uljens (2002) and Uljens & Ylimaki

(2017), remembering the ideas of recognition, summoning to self-activity and *Bildsamkeit*, developed primarily by Fichte, Hegel, Herbart and Schleiermacher.

For Infinito (2003), an educational praxis that seeks to align itself with these approaches, related to education as the ethical self-construction of the learner, features three essential elements or characteristics:

1. An environment that encourages experimentation with the self (what Infinito calls “appropriate educational spaces”)
2. An awareness or recognition of one’s current condition as defined by the given culture and historical moment (what she, following Foucault, defines as “curriculum as genealogy”)
3. An attitude or disposition to criticise

It is clear that a perspective such as the one put forward here moves quite far from the characterisations of affirmative education models and brings us closer to what authors such as Benner (2015), Uljens (2005, 2015), Uljens & Kullenberg (2021) and Uljens & Ylimaki, (2015, 2017) describe as a non-affirmative theory of education.

The similarities between Infinito’s statement and Benner’s position are obvious. They appear clearly in the following quotation from Schleiermacher, which Benner calls “the starting point” for non-affirmative theory of education:

A large part of the activity of the older generation extends to the younger, and it is the more imperfect the less one knows what one is doing and why one is doing it. Therefore, there must be a theory which, starting from the relationship of the older generation to the younger, asks itself the question: what does the older generation really want with the younger? How will the activity correspond to the purpose, how will the result of the activity correspond? On this basis of the relationship of the older with the younger generation, what is incumbent on the one in relation to the other, we build everything that falls into the area of this theory. (Benner, 2015, p. 150; our translation)

By assuming educational relations as a space of dialogical enquiry and problematisation between the two generations, Schleiermacher views the praxis of education as a space of possibility opening for ethical education, as defined in this chapter.

Again, we must refer to the possibilities offered by the interplay between the two constitutive principles of the pedagogical relationship (*Bildsamkeit* and *summoning to self-activity*) as the way to overcome this intrinsic injustice of affirmative educational relationships.

Moreover, the purely educational approach of non-affirmative education, considered as an *Allgemeine Pädagogik*, offers us a basis from which to transcend the space of the purely relational, ethical question between educator and learner (subjectivity and intersubjectivity). Thus, it allows us to introduce into the analysis the elements of the society-individual problematic that must inevitably be present in any theorisation of modern education. Indeed, while the discourse we have been developing clearly points to the problems of a solipsistic, Kantian subjectivation (or, as Foucault called it, linked to the “Cartesian moment”), it does not offer us many clues as to how to overcome it. In this sense, the set of constitutive and regulating principles of a modern conception of education help us to understand and explain the “leap” from social educational demands to the processes of subjectivation of the individual, and

the non-affirmative position also allows us to overcome the reductionism and instrumentalization of education, conceived merely as a mechanism of distributive justice.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have tried to point out the inadequacy of an instrumental interpretation of education as a promoter of distributive/social justice. We have claimed that the idea of justice in education should be expanded towards a conception of justice that is not only relational, but also constitutive of the “just subject,” understood as the ethical self-formation of the individual (development of virtue), resorting to the original approaches with which the idea of justice made its appearance in Western thought. To do so, we have resorted to the analysis of the Platonic *politeia* and *paideia*, seen through the eyes of H. G. Gadamer, which have helped us to argue the indissoluble relations, the existing link, between the ideas of justice and education. With Michel Foucault, we have tried to describe the ontological ethics that supported the original Platonic positions, through the “ethics of self-care.”

In the original formulations of Western philosophy, education and justice were inseparable elements of education, the induction of the ethics of self-care, in which the teacher played a fundamental role, was the path to virtue, the creation of a just soul, and individual virtue in turn was the path to social, relational justice in the polis.

It was about achieving a just *ethos through* the development of just citizens. Just education was an education that induced supporting growth of an ethical nature, or the spiritual dimension of education of which Foucault speaks, and which subsequently led to justice for others in the just city.

Over time, just education, especially from the moment when it occurs as a school phenomenon in modern societies, came to be conceived as a question more related to its distributional qualities. Paraphrasing Foucault (Fornet-Betancourt et al., 1987, p. 125), we could say that in the political thought of modernity (and above all, from the nineteenth century onwards), *the political subject begins to be thought of more as a subject of rights than as an ethical subject*, and this conditions the processes of subjectivation and, of course, educational conceptions. And this “transmutation” of the original educational conceptions, linked to the constitution of the ethical subject, was facilitated by the renunciation of the indissolubility of knowledge from the spiritual transformations or ethical development necessary to access it (Cartesian moment) and didactically supported by the conceptions of education that we have synthesised in the didactical model proposed by Comenius. This way, education is institutionalised and generalised, but it is no longer an ethical act, but a technical one, above all.

The first conclusion of all this is that an education that focuses only on the mechanisms of knowledge distribution, on equality of opportunities or what we know as equality of capacities, without paying attention to the intrinsic *meaning* of these opportunities or these capacities and how education contributes to the ethical construction of the learner, abandons the educative dimensions of education. Abandoning

the educative dimensions will unlikely lead to what is really important, which is the ethical *self-formation* of fair subjects for fairer societies.

A second important conclusion is that the ethical nature of education is therefore the cornerstone on which we must begin to think about the construction of justice in education in order to achieve social justice through education.

The third conclusion is that a school system that is more equitable in the sense that it distributes a minimum amount of instruction more fairly is better than one that is not. However, we should not be satisfied with just improving those distributive features. For school education to become fairer, we should start to incorporate some of the ideas that we are putting forward here.

Seeking justice in education requires broadening our vision and ambition to seek pedagogical relationships that *really become educative*, not only because that is what would move us forward in terms of educational justice, but also because with it we would better contribute to social justice, as Plato and Aristotle had already intuited.

Finally, non-affirmative education, in which the curriculum is understood as a space of “problematization,” rather than a space or place of imposition, seems to us to be a possible path towards “just” education. In non-affirmative education and associated pedagogical leadership, the leaders responsible for the different levels of “curricular” decision-making enjoy adequate autonomy and are not totally subordinate to affirm the “official” curricular proposals. Dialogical educational relations, summarised in what Uljens, in the introductory chapter of this book, drawing on F. D. E. Scheleiermacher, has identified as the Herbartian tradition of “educative teaching,” allows the development of ethical subjects: “The idea [of non-affirmative education] is to support the learner’s growth as an intellectual, moral, social, historical and political subject, her development as a person and citizen.” This is what we believe defines a true educational act, and, in essence, is what makes education more just, in the original sense.

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Chapter 8

Between Doxa and Transformational Bildung: A Phenomenological and Social-Theoretical Rehabilitation of the Formation of Opinions with Egon Schütz and Pierre Bourdieu



Johannes Tüerstig and Malte Brinkmann

Abstract This contribution aims at expanding Benner's understanding of non-affirmative Bildung from a phenomenological, practice-theoretical, and social-theoretical perspective. We thereby problematize the underlying fundamental dualism between socialization, habit, and affirmation on the one hand, and Bildung, transformation, and cognitive reflection on the other, along with a critique of the model of a rational subject. First, with Schütz, Husserl, and Fink, we provide a phenomenological perspective on judgment. With Schütz, it is possible to detach judgment, and thus Bildung and self-activity (Selbsttätigkeit), from the logocentric fixation on knowledge and truth. By including the life-world, the pre-predicative dimensions of judgment, habits, and opinions can be pointed out as the foundation and as the functional mode of judgment. Bildung thus becomes describable as a formation of opinions (Meinungsbildung). The sociality of opinion as judgment is then extended in the second step with Bourdieu in a social-theoretical perspective. For this, we work out habitualized doxa as the primary, judging approach to the world. We thus determine the pre-predicative judgment as a mode of the habitus and show that habitual dispositions in social practices are the basis of the experience of the world. In this way, habit, routine, and habitus can be taken out of the dual of mere affirmation and transformation that underlies Benner's theory. The phenomenological and practice-theoretical considerations make it possible to bring into view both the life-world, and the bodily dimensions of pedagogical practice, as well as the dimensions of power, social inequality, distinction, and privilege, and capture them in their significance for the processes of Bildung.

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M. Uljens (ed.), *Non-affirmative Theory of Education and Bildung*,
Educational Governance Research 20,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30551-1_8

Keywords Bildung · Bourdieu · Phenomenology · Eugen Fink · Practice theory · Habitus

Introduction¹

Dietrich Benner's *General Pedagogy*, published in 2015 in its eighth revised edition, offers a systematic view of the relationships between pedagogical thinking and acting. The coherence and consistency of his argumentation are still evident more than 30 years after its first publication in 1987, and it represents a convincing attempt to articulate what could be considered the systematic core of pedagogy. Benner's intention is both to determine the distinct logic of pedagogical practice without seeking it out in non-pedagogical settings and attributions and to consider and problematize the interplay between pedagogical practice and pedagogical theory. Benner thus fills an old desideratum of pedagogical or educational science (*Erziehungswissenschaft*) since Humboldt, Schleiermacher, and Herbart – something that current contributions in the field of general pedagogy are no longer able or willing to do in this way (cf. Rieger-Ladich, 2020; Thompson, 2020). By emphasizing the non-hierarchicality of social practices, he made a strong case for an inherently pedagogical and educational approach to human praxis. The fundamental questions and problems of general pedagogy raised by Benner are still highly relevant, as the thematically various and international contributions to this volume of essays show.

In our contribution, we aim to question Benner's approach with regard to its presuppositions and foundational principles and to explore possibilities for expanding it from a phenomenological, practice-theoretical, and social-theoretical perspective. This expansion also means to problematize the underlying fundamental dualism between socialization, habit, and affirmation on the one hand, and *Bildung*, transformation, and cognitive reflection on the other, along with the model of a rational subject.

This problematization is carried out with the goal of rehabilitating life-world habitual and doxic experiences in their significance to the theory of *Bildung*. This is accomplished in two steps. First, with Egon Schütz, Edmund Husserl, and Eugen Fink, we provide a phenomenological perspective on the foundations and the modes of operation of the judgment. With Schütz, it is possible to detach judgment and thus *Bildung* and self-activity (*Selbsttätigkeit*) from the logocentric fixation on knowledge, truth, and generality. By including the pre-predicative and doxic dimensions of judgment, habits and opinions can be pointed out as the foundation and as the functional mode of judgment. *Bildung* thus becomes describable as a formation of opinions (*Meinungsbildung*) (cf. Schütz, 1975). The sociality of opinion as

¹All direct quotes in this article that do not specifically refer to English-language publications were translated by the authors themselves.

judgment is then extended in the second step with Pierre Bourdieu from a social-theoretical perspective. For this, we work out the habitualized doxa as the primary, judging approach to the world. We thus determine the pre-predicative judgment as a mode of the habitus and show that habitual dispositions transmitted through social practices are the basis of the experience of the world. In this way, habit, routine, and habitus can be taken out of the dual of mere affirmation and transformation that underlies Benner's theory. The phenomenological and practice-theoretical considerations make it possible to bring into view both the life-world and bodily dimensions of pedagogical practice, as well as the dimensions of power, social inequality, distinction, and privilege, and capture them in their significance for the processes of Bildung.

Non-affirmative Education and Bildung in Dietrich Benner's Work

We would first like to outline the basic ideas of Dietrich Benner's non-affirmative theory of education (Erziehung)² and Bildung. In Benner's understanding, these two theoretical approaches are closely related, insofar as non-affirmative education always implies a 'way of acting pedagogically' (Benner, 2015, p. 155) that is openly directed at a summoning to self-activity (Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit) on the part of the educand. This summoning to self-activity is rooted in the idea of the fundamental Bildsamkeit or perfectibility (Rousseau) of the human being. In this sense, non-affirmative education intentionally aims at non-affirmative Bildung, understood as the 'transformational work of the human being on his or her determination'³ (Benner, 2015, p. 167). It becomes clear that Benner is interested in grasping the basic structures of pedagogical thinking and acting in their systematic and problem-historical relation to one another, as is also stated in the subtitle of his General Pedagogy (Allgemeine Pädagogik).⁴ Benner's non-affirmative theory of education is complemented by a non-affirmative theory of educational institutions, which we will only mention here briefly.

The pair of concepts of affirmative and non-affirmative opens up a field of tension in Benner's theory of pedagogical thinking and acting. Affirmative, understood as positive approval, can refer to different aspects in the context of theories and practices of education. Benner's primary interest in this regard is the 'basic questions underlying an idea of education that does not seek to educate future

²In the following, we use the term 'education' in the same way Benner uses 'Erziehung'. We maintain the German term Bildung untranslated.

³With 'determination' we refer to the German term 'Bestimmung'. In other publications, this term is being translated as 'destiny' (c.f. Benner, Chap. 2, this volume).

⁴The German subtitle reads: Eine systematisch-problemgeschichtliche Einführung in die Grundstruktur pädagogischen Denkens und Handelns. It translates to: 'A systematic-problem-historical introduction to the fundamental structure of pedagogical thinking and acting'.

generations either to affirm an existing order or to recognize an order conceived of by educators' (Benner, Chap. 2, this volume, p. 5). The goal of education, as Benner puts it is that the educand, i.e., the young people who are to be educated, 'enter educational processes (Bildungsprozesse) that have not been directed by education (Erziehung)' (ibid., p. 4). In other words, 'young people were not to be educated to affirm existing conditions or to affirm pedagogical actors as representatives of anticipated conditions but must be enabled to participate in discourses on what is to be preserved and what is to be changed' (ibid., p. 5). A central argument for affirmative education put forward by Benner is 'that every rising generation is educated in a historically given social reality that first demands recognition and that has to be acknowledged before it can be examined with regard to the possibility of change and called into question on the basis of arguments' (Benner, 2015, p. 146). Education in this sense, then, is meant to result in the conservative preservation of the status quo, that is, of established norms, traditional values, and existing social and political conditions. A second affirmative position is that of an education that is directed towards a future that is anticipated by the educating person in the form of a 'vicariously anticipated positivity [...] that is to serve [...] as a normative guideline for pedagogical action' (Benner, 2015, p. 147).

Benner attests to both positions that they start from an 'instrumental understanding of pedagogical practice' and consider education as a 'means to transmit or change given positivities' (ibid.). Accordingly, in both positions, education only represents the 'executive' that imposes 'non-pedagogical demands on pedagogical practice' (ibid.) and thus disregards the regulative principle of a 'pedagogical transformation of societal influences and requirements' (Benner, Chap. 2, this volume, p. 12), meaning the transfer of societal influences on pedagogical processes into pedagogically legitimate ones. Moreover, affirmative education disregards the constitutive principle of summoning to self-activity and thus makes transformation impossible.

A non-affirmative theory of education, on the other hand, strives to orient 'the intentionality of pedagogical action on the principle of the summoning to self-activity and the functionality of social influences under the idea of their pedagogical transformation' (Benner, 2015, p. 148). Pedagogical practice thus appears not as a mere executive of non-pedagogical demands, but in its 'impact on learning processes' (ibid.) of those to be educated. The core question of non-affirmative pedagogical interactions that Benner subsequently articulates is 'how adolescents, without simply being assigned responsibility for the consequential effects of their socialization, can be encouraged to engage in self-activity in such a way that their future destiny does not emerge as a direct result of their socialization but is instead mediated through the reflection of such socialization' (Benner, 2015, p. 149). An adequate theory of education, one may conclude here, is one 'that understand[s] educative influences as the promotion of self-reflection, self-judgment, and self-action and link[s] them back to pedagogical transformations of external demands on education' (Benner, Chap. 2, this volume, p. 15).

Benner understands *Bildung* as a 'human-world-relationship', understood as an 'interplay between the self and the world [...], in which the human being

determines himself in engagement with the world' (Benner, 2015, p. 162). In this way, he follows both Humboldt's theory of Bildung as well as Rousseau's ideas of perfectibility and the *Bildsamkeit* of the human being. Bildung is to be understood in two ways. It encompasses an 'individual side of human Bildung and pedagogical interaction' and 'seeks to align it with the task of transforming indeterminate *Bildsamkeit* into experimental, self-chosen determinations in distinction from affirmative educational concepts that take the word of an unconditional recognition of subjectivity' (Benner, 2015, pp. 170 f.). Furthermore, the 'social side of Bildung' determines it 'in contrast to affirmative pedagogies of culture as that of a transformational activity of culture referring to all areas of human activity, for which, just as for individual *Bildsamkeit*, there is not and cannot be a well-founded, universally valid ideal of Bildung' (ibid.). Thus, it can be summarized that a theory of Bildung aligns the tasks of educatively supported processes of Bildung 'with regard to the concept of indeterminate *Bildsamkeit* and the nonhierarchical relationship between pedagogical practice and other forms of practice' (Benner, Chap. 2, this volume, p. 15).

Bildung as the Formation of Opinions (Meinungsbildung)

In the following, we will problematize Benner's theses and the presuppositions that underlie his approach. We ask under what conditions, presuppositions, and with which figures of legitimization and justification Benner operates. Transformative Bildung is defined by Benner, as outlined above, as thinking, judging, and acting for oneself.⁵ Self-activity as a key principle of *Bildsamkeit* is thus linked to operations of judgment and critique that are founded on reason. Reasonable judgments, in turn, are based on the knowledge that can be derived and legitimized in a rational and cognitive way. In a certain way, it can be said that the subject of Bildung is first and foremost constituted through this. The subject of Bildung, and thus modern, non-affirmative Bildung itself, is founded and legitimized – historically and systematically – in a judging, reflexive-critical transition from socialization to Bildung. According to Benner, the duality of socialization and Bildung is the basis of both the Bildungs-theoretical core question of non-affirmative interactions and the principle of self-activity, as well as the development and legitimization of a modern, public educational system. The subjective and societal fundamentals of modern Bildung and education are thus based on a fundamental dualism and on the model of a rational subject that establishes a humane 'order of things' (Foucault, 2009) through rational judgments that legitimize and universalize the knowledge therein.

With the aim of a foundational-theoretical clarification and a social-theoretical extension, we will ask about the basic principles and preconditions of this approach.

⁵ Benner has elsewhere argued for a pluralization of forms of judgment (cf. Benner, 2009) and made this idea fruitful for a didactics of science (cf. Benner, 2020).

The dualism between socialization on the one hand and Bildung, on the other hand, will be questioned by this social-theoretical extension to also rehabilitate habitual and doxic experiences in terms of a theory of Bildung.

Bildung as the formation of opinions is a central topic in Egon Schütz's philosophical, existential-critical phenomenology and theory of Bildung. In his habilitation, 'Freedom and Destiny. Reflections on the Problem of Bildung from the Perspective of a Theory of Meaning' (Freiheit und Bestimmung. Sinntheoretische Reflexionen zum Bildungsproblem) (Schütz, 1975) and in many of his seminar and lecture writings,⁶ Schütz pursues a critical archaeology and a deconstructive genealogy of the metaphysical presuppositions of pedagogy and of the theory of Bildung. His starting point is the life-world experience in relation to the world and to fellow human beings, which, in its existential significance and event character, asserts itself against scientific, theoretical, medial, and political 'disguises' (Heidegger) and distortions. The outline of an 'existential-critical pedagogy' (Schütz, 2017) understands Bildung as a praxis against the background of anthropology that draws on Heidegger and Fink, according to which the human being as an 'existing relation of truth, world, and being' (ibid.) has to act and fail in cultural praxes. Like Benner, Schütz uses Eugen Fink's six dimensions of praxis as a systematic framework: love, work, play, and aesthetics, power and politics, as well as finitude and education (cf. Fink, 1995, 1970, 2018). Unlike Benner, however, he understands these not in a praxeological way, but with Fink and Heidegger as dimensions of being in which ontological experiences of crisis, failure, wonder, and transformation can occur.⁷

Schütz begins his reflections on the formation of opinions with a metaphysic-critical *deconstruction of the European presuppositions* of judgment.⁸ He shows that Bildung in the European tradition is committed to knowledge and knowledge-adequate truth, assuming an elementary dichotomy of knowledge and opinion (doxa). Opinion as holding-true (Für-wahr-halten) is thus not capable of truthness; Bildung as the formation of opinions would be an 'impossibility' (Schütz, 1990/1991, p. 3). This tradition-rich opposition of knowledge and opinion is reconstructed and deconstructed by Kant and Plato. In a close reading of Kant, Schütz demonstrates that, first, the significance of opinion is connected to the question of the validity and truth of a judgment, and, second, that in it the reasoning subject with its subsuming power of judgment accounts for the certitude of the judgment.

⁶These unpublished writings can be found in the Egon Schütz Archive at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (<https://www.erziehungswissenschaften.hu-berlin.de/de/allgemeine/egon-schuetz-archiv>).

⁷Existential-critical pedagogy is therefore based on a non-subjectivist view of humanity and on a non-teleological theory of practice (cf. Brinkmann, 2017, Introduction).

⁸In the following, we refer to considerations from a lecture held by Egon Schütz at the University of Cologne in the winter term of 1990/91 under the title "Bildung als Meinungsbildung" (Bildung as Formation of Opinion). In this lecture he focuses on the question of the formation of judgment and the plurality of forms of judgment (<https://www.erziehungswissenschaften.hu-berlin.de/de/allgemeine/egon-schuetz-archiv/verzeichnis-der-unveroeffentlichten-schriften/28>).

Third, he shows that holding-true (*Für-wahr-halten*) means the explicit reference of a judgment back to a subject and, in the relationship of judgment, the validation of the judgment considered to be true. Kant distinguishes three hierarchically ascending forms of validity in judgment according to their level of reasonability and legitimacy: judgment of opinion, the judgment of belief, and judgment of knowledge. Schütz then states with Heidegger:

The guideline of the reconstruction [of opinion, belief, and knowledge, ed.], however, is [the modern model of, ed.] the certainty of knowledge, the ‘*certitudo*’, in which the moments of the ‘*certain*’, the ‘*agreed*’, the ‘*undoubted*’ resonates in a fundamental way. [...] Here, holding true can (and must) put to test its general truthfulness and soundness. Within knowledge, the reason is general and sovereign – sovereign in the fact that it is general. And the sovereignty of the knowing reason consists not least in the fact that it not only knows what can be known, but that it also knows what cannot be known, but may reasonably be left to faith (Schütz, 1990/1991, p. 40).

Against the logocentric delegitimization of *Meinen* (i.e., of having an opinion) – and thus also of life-world habits and the habitualities based on them – Schütz brings Husserl’s primordial experiential mode of pre-predicative judgment into play. According to Husserl, judgments are already made in the perceptions of the lived body, but not in a logifying mode. Going beyond this, we would like to present this aspect in more detail hereafter (cf. Brinkmann, 2021, pp. 178 f.). Husserl illustrates the life-world, pre-predicative judgment (cf. Husserl, 1975) by the example of color perception: colors are always already ‘*apprehended*’ (ibid., p. 75) in this kind of perception – as color properties of a certain thing, as colors of a surface with a certain texture, simply as stains on the carpet (cf. ibid.). Objects given in sensory experience are assemblages that can themselves refer to a genesis before they appear in experience. Sensory perceptions are thus based on a pre-predicative judgment that is a basic part of perception and experience, ‘*sensory awareness*’ (ibid., p. 67). ‘*Predicative judgments*’ (ibid., p. 21) and logical judgments build on this genetic process of judgment. They are based on lived bodily reflexivity.⁹ Predicative judgments, however, subordinate perception and experience under a different, linguistic, ‘*grammatical*’ order.

Judging as holding-true (*Für-wahr-halten*) presupposes, according to Schütz and Heidegger, a difference of things, human beings, and relations, which are responded to in the act of differentiation. Against this backdrop, predicative reasoning can only be considered a specific mode of general, inductive reasoning in perception and experience. It responds to a being-different that is prior to the act of differentiating. Differentiating in judgment is thus based on the being different of things, people, and relations. It is, in the truest sense of the word, an ‘*Ur-Teil*’, a division of an original whole that makes differentiation possible. Ontological being-different is the condition of the possibility of being able to differentiate as holding-for-true (cf. Schütz 1990/1991, 1996/1997). This ontological difference implies a

⁹At this point, Husserl differentiates between perceiving (*Wahrnehmen*) and experiencing (*Erfahren*). In the following we will not elaborate on this difference. We owe the following thoughts on Husserl to the suggestions of Severin Sales Rödel.

pre-predicative structure in the self-relationship, an elementary being bent back to oneself of the human being, that already shows itself in the simplest forms of perception up to the experiences of failure, of not-being-able-to, of forgetting, but also in moods and emotions.

If we take judgment as a praxis of human self-relation and as a mode of ‘self-understanding’ (Fink) in the world, then two important conclusions can be drawn: Predicative judgment in the mode of subjectivity and objectivity, of logic and grammar, is, first, only one form of the praxis of differentiating, a praxis that performs and cultivates the cultural and symbolic forms of judgment. Secondly, the epistemological presuppositions of the logical forms of judgment are undermined. Judging no longer means representing the world in the mode of reason, reducing it to terms, or forcing it into a schematism. Instead, judging presupposes the non-representability of human beings and the world.¹⁰

For Schütz, this results in two consequences: First, a radical doubt of the universality and legitimacy of rational knowledge and the sciences based on it. Schütz demands a radical epoché (bracketing) – phenomenologically speaking – which not only points out the limits of logifying knowledge but also deconstructs it. Only after this epistemic-critical operation can other forms of judgment – lived bodily, religious, and above all aesthetic – gain equal importance. The non-hierarchicality of these forms of judgment emerges – in contrast to Benner’s model – after and with the deconstruction of their metaphysical basic assumptions and can thus only emerge after the deconstruction of its underlying logocentrism and its forms of legitimation. Only through deconstruction can plural forms of judgment actually be thought non-hierarchically, i.e., also non-logocentrically. Secondly, if the opinion is no longer logocentrically placed under the suspicion of untruthfulness and provisionality, then – as Schütz makes clear with an image-theoretical interpretation of Plato’s Allegory of the Cave based on Fink – doxic opinion and its different forms of judgment can be understood as ‘image windows’ (Schütz, 1990/1991, p. 79) to the world. After all, according to Schütz, it is in meaning that we make images of the world. With Fink, Schütz differentiates dream images, shadow images, allegorical images, artistic images, and so on. Images are seen as mediums of transcendence, of transcending the doxic, scientific, and representational relations to an embracing whole. In Plato’s Allegory of the Cave and the ascent into the light, an existential relationship is already suggested. For Fink, the image is seen as a medium in which – highly relevant in terms of a theory of Bildung – a relation to oneself, to others, and to the world is expressed, in which this relation is simultaneously revealed on the one hand and concealed on the other. The perspective on the beyond-itself-ness of the image owes itself to an opening for the pre-predicative forms of judgment of opinion (cf. Fink, 2021 [1970]).

¹⁰Brinkmann has elsewhere phenomenologically determined life-world, doxic, individual, and social forms of judgment with regard to Gestalt-theory and with Heidegger, and has identified the practice of judgment (die Übung des Urteilens) as an elementary form of the ability to distinguish (unterscheiden) in terms of a theory of Bildung and specified it in didactical contexts (cf. Brinkmann, 2021).

The rehabilitation of opinion (doxa) implies at the same time rehabilitation of habit and habitus. Both dimensions are highly relevant in terms of the theory of Bildung and education. They can and must be separated from the dual of Bildung versus socialization. A first indication of this social-theoretical turn is given by Günther Buck in his reconstruction of learning as experience. Buck also critically turns against Kant (cf. Buck, 2019, pp. 215 ff.): If in learning, Bildung, and education ‘everything depends on conscious self-determination’ (Buck, 2019, p. 215), then the socially and societally dimensionalized formation of habits can only be seen as heteronomy, i.e., as a foreign determination (Fremdbestimmung) (cf. *ibid.*). If one detaches habit formation and habitus from this normative bracket and expands their experience theoretically, it quickly becomes clear: habits and habitus, like all experiences, are based on a life-world horizon and bodily experience. Habit and habitus, as ‘the structures of behavior’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1963), are neither static-determining nor exclusively conservative-preserving structures. They are both structured and, at the same time, structuring structures (cf. Bourdieu, 2015, p. 98 f.). Habits are thus ‘poorly understood if they are not also seen as intelligent skills open to innovation’ (Buck, 2019, p. 217). *Bildsamkeit* from a phenomenological perspective is not an anthropological capacity of the subject that is directed towards perfectibility, nor is it a mere relational category between processes of Bildung and education (cf. Benner in this volume). Rather, *Bildsamkeit* can only be understood under the conditions of already experienced doxic, real-world experiences. These experiences are not based on the subject (as the *hypokeimenon*, the underlying), but rather originate in the social experiences and habits that precede the life-world, including the others in front of whom and with whom educational processes take place (cf. Ricken, 2012).¹¹

Doxa and Habitus: Habit and Transformation

We will now revisit the relationship between experience, habit, and habitus and elaborate on it from a social-theoretical point of view with Bourdieu. With Schütz, Fink, and Buck, we have so far tried to clarify the significance of doxic opinion and

¹¹ From a phenomenological perspective, education can thus be described with Eugen Fink as life-teaching (Lebenslehre) (Fink, 1970), which can be cultivated into an art of living (Lebenskunst) (cf. Brinkmann, 2021). Education pursues the goal of ‘integration into the real’ (in German Fink writes ‘Einfügung ins Wirkliche’. The term ‘Einfügung’ implies the notion of ‘Fuge’ in the double meaning of the joint or seam of a wall and a fugue in a musical sense) by ‘debating together (*dialogesthai*) the wonder of being in all its basic phenomena’ (Fink, 1992, p. 181). The fundamental concept of educational science is therefore that of ‘docility’ (‘Fügsamkeit’ in German), ‘which is opposed to the well-known fundamental concept of *Bildsamkeit*’ (Fink, 1992, p. 181). The German term *Fügsamkeit* implies more than the English meaning of compliance and obedience, it basically describes the ability to be ‘integrated’. ‘Einfügung’ into the real thus presupposes the ‘Fügsamkeit’ of the person who is being educated, similarly to the way Bildung presupposes *Bildsamkeit*.

its underlying pre-predicative judgments in terms of a theory of *Bildung*. This involves bracketing the logocentric fixation on a reasonable, rational subject. With Bourdieu, it now becomes possible to determine pre-predicative judgments as a mode of the habitus and to interpret them with regard to their social constitution.

For Bourdieu's theory of practice, the concept of doxa is of fundamental importance. He too distinguishes doxa as an opinion from rational, theoretical knowledge. He considers doxa to be an ensemble of opinions being assumed in a mode of pre-predicative belief.¹² They, therefore, 'are accepted as self-evident' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 470) and evolve in 'ordinary acceptance of the usual order that goes without saying and therefore usually goes unsaid' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 424).¹³ For Bourdieu, the doxic experience as a mode of accessing and approaching the world is of such central importance that he determines it as 'l'expérience première du monde sociale' (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 549), that is, as the primary experience of the social world.¹⁴ Similar to Schütz, Bourdieu also assumes that the doxa emerge through repeated and routinized experiences that result in the incorporation of the objective conditions. Bourdieu highlights the significance of the relation between habit and corporeality, pointing out, with recourse to Pascal, that 'custom makes all authority', in other words, that 'the social order is merely the order of bodies' (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 168). Unlike Schütz, Bourdieu does not examine existential self-relations and formative self-understandings, but social and societal relations. Bourdieu is also not interested in the *Bildungs*-theoretical relevance of formation and the opinion-based 'image windows' that we discussed with reference to Fink. He is not initially concerned with *Bildung*, but with the social dimension of being-in-the-world. This social dimension of judgment and opinion now becomes better understood when the doxa is analyzed in relation to the concept of habitus. This way, the implications of Bourdieu's approach for a theory of *Bildung* can be brought to light.

Bourdieu describes the habitus as a system of 'durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures' (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 53). It 'is constituted in practice' (*ibid.*, p. 52), more specifically in and through life-world practices and in the experiences that people make within these social practices. The position in the social space, as well as the different circumstances associated with these positions¹⁵ have the consequence that people make different experiences under the respective specific social conditions of

¹²As an „ensemble des opinions assumées sur le mode de la croyance préreflexive“ (Bourdieu, 1979, S. 60).

¹³In the French original, Bourdieu writes: „la doxa, adhésion ordinaire à l'ordre ordinaire qui, allant de soi, va sans dire“ (Bourdieu, 1979, S. 499). The fact that doxa here act „sans dire“, i.e., unsaid, already indicates that the doxic opinions do not necessarily follow a logocentric logic.

¹⁴Bourdieu's conception of doxa thus shows close resemblance to Husserl's notion of the primordial mode of experience. Closely related to this is Husserl's notion of the "natural attitude," with which he describes the "totality of experiences, conceptions, and assumptions believed to be self-evident [...] which precedes all other settings of being and takes the world as really given" (Schneickert, 2013, p. 77).

¹⁵In Bourdieu's theory, different individual circumstances can be captured as differences in the allocation of economic, cultural, and social capital (cf. Bourdieu, 2015, pp. 49-80).

existence of their growing up and of their lives. The individual habitus is thus largely adapted to the objective conditions under which it developed. The habitualized dispositions that develop from this as a ‘system of schemes of perception, thought, and action’ (Bourdieu, 1974, p. 153) then function ‘as principles that generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor’ (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 53). Habitualized practices are thus specifically not the result of reasonable, rational decisions, as action-theoretical approaches would presuppose. Rather, the habitus represents the ‘principle of practical comprehension’ not through a ‘knowing consciousness’ but through ‘the practical sense of a habitus inhabited by the world it inhabits’ (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 142). For Bourdieu, the social praxis in which the habitus is established is ‘the site of the dialectic of the *opus operatum* and the *modus operandi*’ (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 52), that is, the place where performed practical actions as products or results, on the one hand, and the way they are performed and executed, on the other, come together in a meaningful way. Praxis takes place in the mode of habitualized routines, in which one’s own life circumstances, as well as the experiences that are made and that are potentially possible within them, are understood in their practical logic and meaning: ‘The homogeneity of habitus that is observed within the limits of a class of conditions of existence and social conditionings is what causes practices and works to be immediately intelligible and foreseeable, and hence taken for granted’ (ibid., p. 58).

The habitus can thus be understood as a ‘practical sense’ (‘*sense pratique*’, is also the original title of Bourdieu’s *The Logic of Practice*), as a sense for the appropriateness and meaning of praxis and its practices. For the most part, this practical sense is not explicitly taught through teaching, instruction, or intentional education, but rather in the mode of an ‘implicit pedagogy’ (ibid., p. 69). Through this non-explicit, often pre-predicative mode, ‘schemes are able to pass directly from practice to practice without moving through discourse and consciousness’ (ibid., p. 74). Bourdieu thus describes an implicit mode of transmission by which the meaning of praxis and the ways of performing practices are practised, exercised, and incorporated in a process of ‘internalization of externality’ (ibid., p. 45). The social praxis in which these experiences are made must be understood as a bodily praxis. It is performed through repeated and repeatable practices that are carried out *with* the body and whose immanent ‘social sense’ is thereby incorporated and inscribed *in* the body. In this sense, the habitus is ‘embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history’ (ibid. p. 56); it is ‘the socially made body’ (Bourdieu & Warquant, 1992, p. 127).

The power of habitualized doxa, therefore, lies in the fact that they lead to an unquestioned acceptance of their conditions. Social practices understood in this way, always imply a pre-predicative judgment as well, in that the pre-found objective conditions of the praxis and the way in which the praxis itself is performed provide grounds for the possibility of social distinction, that is, the judgment of

legitimate and illegitimate practices in their respective ‘subtle differences’.¹⁶ The life-world and routinized praxis thus become palpable in its judging dimension. In addition to the dispositions of perceiving, thinking, and acting, Bourdieu also writes elsewhere of dispositions of ‘appréciation’ (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 204), that is, of evaluation or judgment. The ensemble of dispositions would thus have to be expanded, on the one hand, by the dimension of judgment. On the other hand, it becomes clear that in Bourdieu’s perspective, comparable to Husserl’s primordial experiential mode of pre-predicative judgment, every perception, thought, and action already implies certain pre-predicative judgments. Social judgments are constantly made in the habitual mode: the habitus judges the appropriateness and legitimacy of people’s subjective perceptions, their own experiences, the expressions they make, the objective conditions to which they are exposed, as well as the practices of others. Framed in this way, following our discussion of Schütz, the habitus can also be understood as an implicit opinion that becomes explicit in social practices. These judgments are thus expressed not only, or even predominantly, in theoretical and explicit judgments, e.g., in a political opinion, but primarily in very practical terms in the subtle distinctions of life-world praxis, for example, of eating or dressing.¹⁷ The habitus as a kind of practical opinion thus fundamentally implies a doxic, pre-predicative, implicit, and embodied mode of judgment. This way, Bourdieu criticizes a one-sided focus on logical forms of judgment and rational knowledge and, like Husserl and Schütz, rehabilitates lived-bodily and social modes of judgment as a way of accessing and relating to the world.

According to Benner’s understanding, the genesis of the habitus and its modes of functioning described up to this point fall into the realm of affirmative socialization. According to Benner, however, it is the responsibility and characteristic of pedagogical praxis to transcend the socializing influences on adolescents. Thus, for Benner, the habitualized doxa only become relevant in terms of a theory of Bildung when they are explicitly and cognitively responded to. Only then a transformation of the existing relationship between the self and the world can occur. This transformational moment is determined both as a normative goal of pedagogical processes and as a constitutive characteristic for practices to be recognized as pedagogical practices at all. In this way, Benner can define education as a summoning to self-activity, that is, as a call to critically and explicitly evaluate one’s own experiences of socialization and to relate to them reflexively in order to give oneself one’s own purpose in engagement with the world. A perspective on a theory of Bildung

¹⁶ Even if the title significantly differs from the French original (“La distinction - Critique Sociale du Jugement”, Bourdieu 1979) and the English translation (“Distinction - A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste”, Bourdieu 1984), the German title of Bourdieu’s *Distinction*, ‘Die feinen Unterschiede’ (Bourdieu, 1982) (literally meaning ‘the subtle differences’), captures an interesting point.

¹⁷ This becomes apparent in Bourdieu’s research in “La Distinction - Critique Sociale du Jugement” (Bourdieu, 1979), which prominently carries the term judgement in its title. From the Latin meaning of *distinctio* as distinction or differentiation, the proximity to judging as distinguishing can also be derived.

conceived in such a way would only allow us to think of Bildung as an interruption, a transgression, or a transformation of the habitus.¹⁸ We would now like to conclude, however, by showing that routines, habits, doxa, change, transformation, and Bildung are not categorically mutually exclusive, and that, in fact, repetitions can also be characteristic of experiences and processes of Bildung (cf. Brinkmann, 2017).¹⁹ Following Schütz and Bourdieu, we thus try to show that both perspectives are enclosed in the formation of opinions and in the habitus.

Bourdieu's 'emphasis on the stability of the social' (Schäfer, 2016, p. 137) earned him strong criticism, which repeatedly focuses on the 'assumed persistence of incorporated schemes of perception, thought, and action' (Schäfer, 2016, p. 139) (cf. Liebau, 2009; Rieger-Ladich, 2004, 2005). Reading Bourdieu himself, it becomes clear that he does not understand and does not want habitus to be understood as deterministic. The most fundamental differentiation, that already makes this distinction apparent, is that he speaks of *dispositions*. Bourdieu writes that the habitus functions 'not along the paths of a mechanical determinism, but within the constraints and limits initially set on its inventions' (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 55). He notes that 'habitus is difficult to understand only so long as one remains locked in the usual antinomies – which the concept of the habitus aims to transcend – of determinism and freedom, conditioning and creativity, consciousness and the unconscious, or the individual and society' (ibid., p. 55). Thus, habitus is not deterministic; rather, it is characterized by an "openness" to failure, reinterpretation, and conflict' (Reckwitz, 2003, p. 294). Closedness and openness thus do not describe mutually exclusive opposites, but 'two sides of the 'logic of praxis'' (ibid.). Bourdieu, therefore, criticizes a dualistic perspective that categorically distinguishes between stability (describable as an affirmation in Benner's sense) and change (corresponding to Bildung in Benner's case). For him, habitus always implies both an active (structuring) and a passive (structuring) side. He highlights that the habitus changes 'constantly in response to new experiences', and that the habitualized dispositions are 'subject to a kind of permanent revision' (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 161).

The body, or rather the Leib, plays a central role in this, as it does for Husserl and Schütz. Speaking with Husserl, the lived body is both the 'expressive body' (Husserl, 1989, 259) and the 'zero point' (ibid., p. 166), i.e., the medium of perception of the world and the 'pathic and passive sides of embodied experience' (Brinkmann et al., 2019, p. 3). Bourdieu writes that with a 'Heideggerian play on words, one might say that we are disposed because we are exposed'. He continues:

¹⁸This way of understanding Bildung is very prevalent in the current German-speaking discourse on the theory of Bildung. Here, Bildung is directly interpreted as a transformation of the habitus (cf. Koller, 2011).

¹⁹Here, Bourdieu meets with temporal-phenomenological analyses of the "changing strength of repetition" (Waldenfels, 2001). This way, the Eurocentric opposition of habit on the one hand and on the other hand freedom or creativity in repetition can be undermined: Every repetition already implies a modification or a "shift" (*décalage*), a discontinuity in the continuity of experience (cf. Brinkmann, 2020).

It is because the body is [...] exposed and endangered in the world, faced with the risk of emotion, lesion, suffering, and sometimes death, and therefore obliged to take the world seriously [...] that it is able to acquire dispositions that are themselves an openness to the world, that is, to the very structures of the social world of which they are the incorporated form (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 140f.).

Disposition and exposition, habits and change, routine and openness, or in pedagogical terms, habitus and Bildung, are thus not only *not* mutually exclusive but are rather inseparably related to each other.

We have already pointed out with Buck that customary and habitualized experiences must be understood as open to innovation. The habitus also implies a moment of creativity; it can relate to new or unknown practical situations and produce new patterns or varieties of social practices. For Bourdieu, however, this openness of the habitus must always be seen in relation to the constraints and limits initially set on its inventions (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 55). Bourdieu thus addresses the limits of the social constitution of human praxis. At this point, Bourdieu's theory becomes graspable as a social-theory that makes it possible to include the social conditions and preconditions under which human praxis takes place. This allows us to follow up on the rehabilitation of habitual and doxic experiences elaborated by Schütz and extend it in a social-theoretical way with Bourdieu's perspective. Social relations of power and domination, of social inequality, of distinction and social privilege, which are the preconditions of every doxic experience of the self and the world, can thus be included and reflected in their significance for the processes of Bildung. Referring back to Benner, we can thus show with Bourdieu that the non-affirmative processes of Bildung are not fully understood if we understand them exclusively as pedagogical actions initiated by non-affirmative education as a summoning to self-activity. Rather, it becomes clear that habit, doxa, and habitus also hold great and so far often overlooked potential for Bildung. This can be grasped by recourse to Schütz's concept of the formation of opinions. From this point of view, Bildung as the formation of opinions would have to include and rehabilitate the doxic experience of the world and thus both the pre-predicative and image-related as well as the societal and social dimensions of judgment.

Conclusion

Taking Benner's thoughts on the relationship between affirmative and non-affirmative pedagogical praxis as a starting point, we have questioned his approach in terms of its presuppositions and limitations. Drawing on Schütz, it became clear that Benner grounds Bildung on cognitive forms of judgment that are undermined by pre-predicative judgment and opinion. At the same time, this calls into question the underlying notion of the strong subject that is being constituted in cognitive judgment. Benner traces the processes of Bildung back to the practices of non-affirmative education in the form of a summoning to self-activity. This understanding of Bildung can be extended by considering life-worldly, pre-predicative,

pre-linguistic, and embodied judgments in their significance for Bildung. To do so, the fundamental dual between Bildung and socialization, transformation and repetition, and the model of the rational subject that legitimates and universalizes a cognitive ‘order of things’ (Foucault, 2009) in rational judgments must be questioned. With a perspective on Bildung as the formation of opinions, doxic opinion and habitus can also be grasped in terms of their relevance for Bildung. Moreover, with Bourdieu, it becomes possible to include the social dimension of doxic opinion and thus also the conditions of power and dominance, e.g., in the form of social inequality or distinction, dimensions that are only hinted at in Benner’s theory.²⁰ We self-critically admit at this point that this extension is associated with a twofold difficulty, the solution to which is yet to be found. With the phenomenological and practice-theoretical extensions, we are at risk of losing the systematic sharpness of the terms used by Benner, a sharpness on which the great impact and reception of his General Pedagogy appear to be based. On the other hand, this extension also has consequences for the determination of normative aspects of theories of Bildung and education. Ultimately, especially in postmodern, post-democratic, or what have meanwhile become ‘post-factual’ times, we would like to admit that not all opinions might or should be valued equally and that there are degrees of rationality in the formation of opinions, which are currently being vehemently disputed.

We hope to have shown with Schütz and Bourdieu that processes of Bildung are not exclusively based on discontinuous, interrupting, and transformation-oriented summonings to self-activity but are first and foremost also made possible by repetitive, routinized, and habitualized dispositions and the pre-predicative formation of opinions. This constitutes a self-relation that is always already open in varying degrees – to the world, to others, and to oneself – and that is practically constituted and cultivated in opinions.

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²⁰The consequences of this for a concept of education (Erziehung) that is not exclusively grounded in explicit and intentional practices are explored in Johannes Türistig’s dissertation project (also cf. Türistig, 2021).

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Chapter 9

Hermeneutics in the Non-affirmative Theory of Education



Mari Mielityinen-Pachmann and Michael Uljens 

Abstract This chapter explores how the general theory of hermeneutics may help us to clarify how education and the process of *Bildung* relate. To this end, the chapter consists of two sections. The first section outlines why we need different notions of *subjectivity* and *intersubjectivity* for talking about the premises of pedagogical interaction and, in addition, about the results of *Bildung*. Three pairs of subjectivity and intersubjectivity are identified: as anthropological preconditions; as notions emanating from socialisation into a life-world; and finally, as self-reflexive categories. This first section views non-affirmative pedagogical intervention and *Bildsamkeit* as mediating between three pairs of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. The second section deepens the above reasoning by exploring how *hermeneutics* can function as a complementary approach for clarifying non-affirmative pedagogy. More precisely, how are the central questions of hermeneutics constitutive of and present in a theory of non-affirmative education?

Keywords Hermeneutics · Intersubjectivity · *Bildsamkeit*

Introduction

As an institutional form of education, *teaching* invites the learner to engage in reflective interpretation of cultural norms and contents. In making the world accessible from various perspectives, teaching itself features unique forms of mediating interpretative activity and understanding.

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This chapter explores how general theory of hermeneutics may help us to clarify how education and the process of *Bildung* relate. To this end, the chapter consists of two sections. The first section outlines why we need different notions of *subjectivity* and *intersubjectivity* for talking about the premises of pedagogical interaction and, in addition, about the results of *Bildung*. This first section views non-affirmative pedagogical intervention and *Bildsamkeit* as mediating between three different forms of subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

The second section deepens the above reasoning by exploring how *hermeneutics* can function as a complementary approach for clarifying non-affirmative pedagogy. More precisely, how are the central questions of hermeneutics constitutive of and present in a theory of non-affirmative education (Benner, 1995)?

Education and *Bildung* vs. Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity

In any education theory, there is an obvious need to explain what a pedagogical intervention is and how it contributes to the individual's establishment and development of personal identity and, in this process, how the individual comes to share the world with others. However, in order for education to be possible in practice, we typically assume that teaching relies on the existence of an already existing or shared life-world or some other form of mutuality (symmetry) between self and other. How else would it be possible to reach out to the other in her or his otherness, if we did not share the world in some fundamental sense? Yet, at the same time, we think that the very process itself is necessary for establishing such a shared world. This indicates a paradox: as a premise, we need to assume the existence of something (a shared world) that only comes into being through the process itself. A way to solve this paradox is to make a distinction between a shared world existing at the beginning of the pedagogical process and a different shared world, as the consequence of the process.

A similar paradox seems to be present when discussing subjectivity. In viewing teaching as the summoning of the learner's self-activity, it seems we need to assume the existence of an Other, or a subject, being addressed. However, at the same time, it is only by addressing the other that the subject develops into a cultural being, i.e., becomes somebody. Again, the constellation is paradoxical: as a premise, education seem to assume the existence of something that only results from education itself. In this case, too, there seems to be a need to make a distinction between some version of subjectivity at the beginning of the education process, and a different subjectivity at its end.

The above reasoning indicates that we need to accept some form of *symmetry* or radical intersubjectivity as well as some form of *asymmetry* or radical subjectivity, not only as a starting point for a theory of education but also as something education aims at or results in. In other words, at the beginning of the educational process, we share the world to some extent, but not totally, as we all are different from each other. At the end of the educational process, we find ourselves again as subjects that

differ from others in new ways but also find us as subjects that have come to share the world in new ways. To conclude, at the beginning of the educational process, we are the same, yet we are also different from each other. But, at the same time, even if it is through the process of education that we *become* the same, we also become different from each other. Sometimes this is expressed by saying that enculturation and individuation are two sides of the same process, or parallel. In this light, education is about *being* and *becoming* the same (intersubjectivity) and different (subjectivity). Expressed a little cryptically, the paradox of education is that we are what we become, and that we become what we are – namely the same and different.

Yet, for analytical reasons, the chapter keeps up the distinction between *Bildung* as primary socialisation and *Bildung* as secondary socialisation. *Bildung* as primary socialisation refers to growing into a culture through participatory activity in its ordinary practises and habits. *Bildung* as secondary socialisation refers to pedagogical reflection, intentionally making the taken-for-granted life-world experiences an object for reflection with the help of general knowledge or others' experiences. For these reasons, there is a need for different versions of both subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Second, the dynamics between these different versions of subjectivity and intersubjectivity can partly be explained by pedagogical concepts: 'recognition', *Bildsamkeit*, 'summoning to self-activity'.

What Comes First, Subjectivity or Intersubjectivity?

Historically, the previous reasoning refer to the debate of how to relate subjectivity and intersubjectivity, partly originated in J. G. Fichte's critique of Kant's transcendental philosophical idealism (Williams, 1997; Uljens, 2001). Fichte's contribution was to see the individual's empirical *consciousness of freedom* as intersubjectively mediated by the Other. The self, he explained, becomes an object for itself, or aware of itself as free, only by being recognised as such by another. Kant had argued that although humans live under the influence of the external world, they are not determined by it. The human being always has a choice. But how should these choices be made? Kant assumed the existence of the moral law of which humans are aware a priori, i.e., before experience. He then assumed that the individual may choose to follow or not follow, the moral law. According to the moral law and its *categorical imperative*, an individual should never treat other human beings only as means to one's own ends. Further, the individual should only act according to principles that deserve the status of being universal laws. In any case, given her freedom, the individual can make her own choices, such as whether to act against these principles. For Fichte, the critical point was the reference to an a priori *awareness* of the moral law, that is, an awareness of these laws before empirical experience (Fichte, 2000). In doing this, Fichte argued, Kant thereby, in fact, included a reference to a shared and experiential, intersubjective, life-world. After all, the moral law said something about how individuals' were to relate to each other. Thus, awareness of the principles of the moral law was not given *before* experience but was instead constituted

intersubjectively. By herself, Fichte argued, the subject cannot become aware of herself *as* free. Instead, the individual develops awareness of herself as being free, and as having a will by being recognised and treated *as* free, while also recognising others as free. If the individual's awareness of herself as free and as a reasoning subject is dependent on the other's recognition and related education, the conclusion is that nobody has the *right* to act in ways that make the Other's freedom impossible.

Not only is it implied, in Fichte's reasoning, that this right of the Other is to be *recognised*, but also that the Other should be *summoned* to exercise her freedom. Educating the *will* means thus to summon the Other's potentiality to develop awareness of herself as being free and to reflect on one's freedom in relation to Others' freedom. Regardless of how the subject responds to summons, she becomes aware of herself as an individual having a will and acting out from a will, which means to make choices and act according to them.

From an education point of view, the above reasoning is central, as the dilemma with transcendental idealism (radical freedom philosophy) is educationally problematic. If the subject were able to constitute herself as an object *for* herself *by* herself, this would resemble contemporary radical constructivism, which, in principle, leaves very little, if any, room for pedagogical influences. In fact, in a radical constructivist philosophy of mind, education is neither possible nor necessary.

Today, we can broadly identify at least two different but complementary subject-philosophical positions in the philosophy of mind. According to a so-called *egological* or phenomenological conception, 'the Other' is constituted by the experiencing subject (Uljens, 2002). This is the traditional subject-philosophical position (Crossley, 1996). A kind of reversed position, though still subject-centered, is recognition-oriented philosophy of mind, as represented by Hegel (Frank, 1991, 459f; Williams, 1997). Here, the self *as recognised by the other*, is of primordial significance. In this case, it seems, the Other's recognition of the self, subordinates the subjects coming into being to the Other's recognising act, so that the Self is partly constituted by the Other's experience. In this reading, the Self would be dependent on the Other (Honneth, 1996).

Philosophers like Merleau-Ponty, Buber, Bakhtin, Mead, and Taylor have all challenged the subject-centered, individualistic, or rationalistic approach (Uljens & Kullenberg, 2021). Social philosophy in general has witnessed a growth in interest in intersubjectivity (Varga & Gallagher, 2012). Such *intersubjective* positions have in common the fact that before subjectivity, there is something fundamental that is shared. This can be language, norms, practices, or culture. This seems a very reasonable point of departure as long as we talk about enculturated subjects like children attending school, who already are in possession of e.g., language. The strength of an intersubjective point of departure becomes obvious precisely in relation to language. If we separate between the individual's acts and the meaning of these acts, in ways that resemble the distinction between matter and meaning in didactics, then the *meaning* of the individual's acts is partly dependent on somebody else's interpretation. Taking part in such interpretations then helps the subject identify herself differently. In this view, the intersubjective relation becomes a condition for

subjectivity. However, this explanation assumes that participating subjects *already* share a common language or culture for this interaction to be possible. To the extent we already share something, we cannot, by pedagogical means or otherwise, move into this shared world; we are already there. To the extent that we already share the world, education appears obsolete.

However, intersubjectivity does not need to be limited to sharing cultural practices, languages, or the like. Even for Husserl, there existed two versions of intersubjectivity. On the one hand, there was a taken-for granted everyday world where we operate and where we are in a ‘natural attitude’, and, on the other, transcendental intersubjectivity, in the form of general knowledge (Uljens & Kullenberg, 2021; Bengtsson, 2001; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Yet Husserl, in the end, accepts a transcendently founded epistemology based on an unconditional ego.

In contrast, following Merleau-Ponty (1962), perception as such may be considered intersubjective. Perception “as an opening to another that functions as a pre-reflexive, pre-objective, and pre-egological level, the solipsist idea is challenged about private perceptual worlds” (1996, 29). In this light, intersubjectivity is not reducible to a result of a process of Bildung, but is rather a constitutive aspect of human experience that is given and cannot be thought away.

The conclusion from the previous reasoning is that, rather than taking *either* subjectivity or intersubjectivity as its point of departure, we may, in non-affirmative theory of education, argue in favor of an educational approach that distinguishes between different forms of subjectivity and intersubjectivity (see Fig. 9.1). As argued in more detail elsewhere (Uljens, 2001; Uljens & Kullenberg, 2021), we may discern between pre-linguistic subjectivity, cultural subjectivity (identity, Me) and (self-)reflexive subjectivity. Corresponding to this, we may discern between corporeally constituted (pre-linguistic) intersubjectivity, linguistic or experiential life-world intersubjectivity, and (self-)reflexive intersubjectivity (Uljens, 2001; also

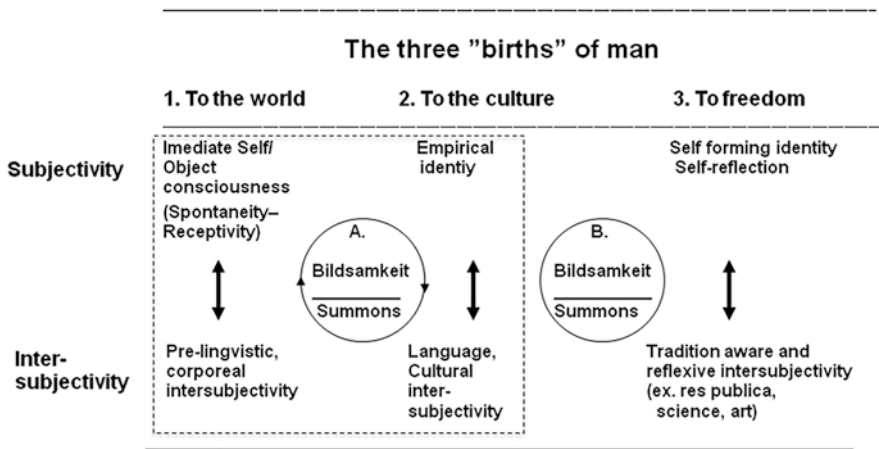


Fig. 9.1 Bildsamkeit and summons as mediating practices as related to various forms of subjectivity and intersubjectivity (following Uljens, 2008)

in Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017). While the first two forms are given by birth, the following forms are experientially and historically established and developed.

What Schleiermacher then calls *spontaneity* and *receptivity* are here interpreted as fundamental assumptions about what it means to be a human being (philosophical anthropology). The individual is experientially and experimentally oriented towards the world, simultaneously experiencing it and trying to make sense of it. This chapter reminds of and refers to Merleau-Ponty's idea that the human pre-linguistic being in the world constitutively involves a fundamental interpersonal or intersubjective dimension. This is a corporeally constituted pre-linguistic intersubjectivity. The corporeal relation between the mother and child, broken by birth, continues between the child and rests on an experiential level of sharing the world. As the newborn child recognises the mother's voice better than other voices, in this sense, the subject also shares something experientially constituted.

The first forms of rudimentary spontaneity that the child demonstrates are directed by reflex, not will. Today, we know from empirical research that how the newborn is stimulated (or summoned) also affects the biological development of the brain. However, the child's existence itself, in front of the parents, is a challenge or moral call to care, which as such establishes a shared world. Care and love, as a response to the existence of the child, contribute to creating an experiential, intersubjective world. This original summons on the child's part is of course not intentional or aware, but it still raises a moral challenge for the caretaker – how to live up to this moral responsibility? On the other hand, for sound self-esteem to develop, affirmative recognition (love) of the child is crucial.

Very much of the caretaker's way of relating to the child is obviously an example of recognition based and tactful summoning. Just by calling the child by a name or treating the child *as if* it had a will, *as if* it would be capable of what she might become capable of (Benner, this volume), the child develops a sense of herself.

At the left side of Fig. 9.1, there is a distinction between spontaneity, receptivity, and *Bildsamkeit*. This is a reminder that *Bildsamkeit* sometimes in philosophical anthropology refers to what constitutes a human being's existence in the world. It also refers to an activity that is a response to pedagogical summons. In the first meaning, *Bildsamkeit* would be something that the pedagogue recognises as a condition, i.e., reminding of Schleiermacher's spontaneity and receptivity. In its second meaning, *Bildsamkeit* is a relational notion that binds the summoning and the learner's activity together. In this respect, a pedagogical space is co-constructed around a topic, matter, or problem – something pointed at.

Figure 9.1 reminds us that summoning and *Bildsamkeit* leading to the child's ability to say *Me* and to share the world by e.g., participation as a linguistic subject, are examples of the double-sided process of *Bildung*, establishing a sense of *Me* and *We*. For analytical reasons only, subjectivity and intersubjectivity are distinct from each other.

From this follows that pedagogically addressing the *newborn* and the *encultured subject*, first, by *recognising* the Other's potentiality to self-activity, and second, by pedagogical summons of the Other's self-activity, is in principle the same (A and B in the figure), but, again, for *analytical* reasons kept apart. Some might like to call

the left side of the figure for socialisation into shared practices, while the right side of the figure would indicate the pedagogical work in public education aiming at, new forms of reflective subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

Following the Finnish philosopher Johan Vilhelm Snellman's pedagogical analyses (Snellman, 1861), education of the home is represented as a normative, primary socialisation to prevailing praxis and normative systems. This would be an example of affirmative pedagogy. By contrast, the school's task was, according to Snellman, to help the learner move into the *world of shared or general knowledge*, through which existing normative systems may become objects for reflection. This would be a question of secondary socialisation, which transcends the education of the home. Although this distinction is valuable, it would be a simplification to say that the home nurtures and school teaches, so that all educational activity in the home is affirming, while all activities in the school would be non-affirming. On the contrary, it is easy to identify non-affirmative practices in any home. The same is true for school. Numerous studies show how schools contribute to the unreflectively passing on of normative patterns of practice. Consequently, the distinction between affirmative and non-affirmative pedagogical activity becomes an analytic tool for discussing both caretakers' and teachers' pedagogical activity.

On the right side of the figure, we find non-affirmative pedagogy, accepting emancipatory pedagogy, while aiming at a self-determined subject that is aware of her identity, but now in a reflexive or self-formatational sense, understanding and respecting others. On the collective, intersubjective side, Figure 9.1 reminds us that formal education expands beyond enculturating subjects into cultural practices. It is about learning the value of conceptual knowledge, art, political life, etc. as various forms of collaborative self-reflexive activities. As the individual's self-image depends on social interaction and the ability to engage in the discerning and critical reflection necessary for autonomous thinking, these are considered individual rights, then education is a response to the moral demand that arises from accepting these rights (Fichte, 2000).

In this first section, we pointed at various notions of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, valuable for identifying premises and consequences of education, as well as how pedagogical interventions in the form of non-affirmative summoning and the process of *Bildung* operate as mediating processes between these forms. The next section deepens the analysis by opening up hermeneutic dimensions of the premises, the process, and the aims of *Bildung* and education.

Hermeneutics in Education as Summoning of Self-Activity and *Bildung*

As the tradition of hermeneutic pedagogy is extensive, it is hardly surprising that the approaches to understanding of *understanding* differs radically from one philosopher to another (e.g. the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher to Gadamer, or further to

poststructuralist hermeneutics as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard). This chapter does not rely on only one representative of the tradition; still, our considerations are mostly based on classical hermeneutics (e.g., Schleiermacher, Nohl, Bollnow), but also on critical hermeneutics as developed by Klaus Mollenhauer.

We begin by looking at how interpretation and understanding, as aspects of pedagogical activity, mediate between individuals and society and how they are constitutive of the educational relationship between teacher and learner. As a kind of conclusion, we claim that understanding is not only a part of the process but also one of the *aims of educational activity* – in many different ways.

Bildung as an Interpretative Process

A first point of departure is to perceive Bildung as the subject's dynamic relation to the world, to others, and to him/herself. It includes an experiential (*Erlebnis/das Erleben*), a reflexive and a communicative dimension. Following Dilthey's theory of pedagogical hermeneutics, 'experience' enables access to the world and to others, including emotion, perception, judgement, and will (Uhle, 1981, 9). 'Experience' is a basic category describing how the subject is or exists in the world and in relation to it. The *process* of Bildung is a change in one's experience or identity, or more generally, a modification in the way we see the world around us as well as ourselves within it.

Second, Bildung involves the subject's *interpretative activity*. We can only interpret and understand phenomena *expressed* by other subjects. In this respect, the core of pedagogical hermeneutics is the notion of *text* (or an expression, a sign, etc.) (e.g., Rittelmeyer & Parmentier, 2001, 1). Thus, an important point of interpretation is that language is the medium.¹ Both parties of the pedagogical relationship live reciprocally in the medium of language. Already the first part of the word *interpretation* reveals the relationality of Bildung and the reciprocity of the process. Drawing on Gadamer's understanding of understanding, Kerdemann (1998, 264) concludes that "to understand, rather, is to participate in an event of time and tradition in which common meaning comes to be realized in the to-and-fro" of language and dialogue. The efforts to make sense of our own experiences of the world, of others, and ourselves include *learning to express* one's experiences in language so they may be communicated and shared with others. In this respect, others contribute to establishing the meaning of our experiences. The possibility of education lies in this communicative process.

Third, the professional teacher's role covers interpretation and understanding on *behalf* of the learner in relation to external interests as codified in a curriculum. In

¹Humboldt especially emphasized the linguistic aspect of Bildung. Also, philosophers like Herder emphasized the role of language in the process of Bildung (e.g., Benner, & Brüggem, 2004, 193).

this, cultural mediation is at the core of the intergenerational and cultural-historically situated education processes. In this respect, teachers do not only interpret the world for themselves as subjects but also operate as professional interpreters and mediators between culture and the learners. Teachers reflect on how to open up or make relevant parts of the culture accessible for the learners and also how to engage students in processes of *Bildung*. Klaus Mollenhauer's description of *representation* in "Forgotten Connections" (Mollenhauer, 1983) demonstrates, how education in general, but the school as an institution in particular, 'simplify' the complexity of the world. It represents elements of the reality 'packed' in the curriculum.

As observed in the first section, in education, for pedagogical communication to be possible, it presupposes initial intersubjectivity and subjectivity. As observed, reaching shared 'understanding' is both a central *aim*, and is parallel to the learners' own individuation. Understanding is also a part of the pedagogical *process* itself, both on the behalf of teachers and students. In carrying out such mediation, the teacher pays attention not only to the learner's present experiences, but also the learner's future.

Education as Mediation Between Individual and Society

Hermeneutical pedagogy features dialectic thinking between different poles. It is by operating in the tension between these poles, like the individual and society, that offers the possibility to enable growth of personality. Expressed in Wilhelm von Humboldt's words, to strive for the "highest and most proportional *Bildung* of his capabilities (*Kräfte*) to a whole".

In this mediation between the individual and society, the school operates as "middle sphere" having an educational role between family and "a real world" in preparing the younger generation. In this work, the teacher is forced to continuously balance between the various ideals, requirements and expectations of the homes, the society, and individual needs and aspirations.

To operate in this "middle sphere" is challenging. Just to give some examples. Should the teacher give his pupil a good grade in order to encourage him, or should the teacher prepare his pupil to face a hard life outside of the school by giving the student a lower grade? (see Dörpinghaus et al., 2006, 86). Another example, pointed out by O.F. Bollnow (1952), is that in the pedagogical relation, *patience* plays an important role. The educator has sometimes to "waste time" in waiting for the child to carry out a certain action. Pedagogical patience reflects tactfulness and sensitivity towards the learner's activities, but is often weighted against how it pays off in the future perspective. Schleiermacher also reminds that in education we sometimes have "to sacrifice the moment for the future" (orig. Schleiermacher, 1820/21, KGA II/13, S. 394). Thus, to work in this "middle sphere", i.e., in the tensions between different expectations, ambitions, evaluations, requirements, and limitations, may be frustrating for the teacher. This imperfection is very familiar to teachers, who understand that the all aims of the curriculum cannot be reached within given

frames, caused by a number of different reasons other than their own ambitions: problems in classroom management, too little time, inadequate learning materials, problems of learning, or something else (Danner, 2006, 226). These examples demonstrate that mediation is not a technical thing but requires continuous discerning thought and moral positioning, weighing interests and ambitions. It is not about just affirming things. Rather, the openness that follows from the human being indeterminate (*Bildsamkeit*) points to a hope for the future. Yet, what the learner may reach, we cannot know.

Understanding: The Dialectics Between Being, Thinking, and Knowing

As a concept in hermeneutical pedagogy, *understanding* is defined quite differently. In what follows, we provide some insights into pedagogical understanding in Schleiermacher's hermeneutics and theory of education.

We can hardly properly understand Schleiermacher's hermeneutics without *dialectics*. For him, *dialectics* encompasses his entire philosophical system and is obviously part of his epistemology. The main feature of this dialectic is the polarity between 'being' (*Sein*) and 'thinking' as well as 'knowledge' (*Wissen*). Dialectics is based on two manifestations of the *absolute*, whereby 'being' corresponds to 'nature' and 'thinking' and 'knowing' correspond to 'reason' (Fischer, 2001, 75). From this, one might conclude that 'being' is found in nature, and 'reason' is what forms thoughts and knowledge. However, Schleiermacher did not share this idea. Rather, what *is* or exists is only "as (far as it has) been thought of". On the other hand, thinking or knowing are possible through "being". The fact that *being* and *knowing* are immediately or inherently connected also establishes intersubjectivity, since *thinking* is possible only in the medium of language. Schleiermacher also describes dialectics as an "art of conversation" ("Kunst des Gedankenwechsels").

The anthropological basis for *knowledge* is the natural and rational human being and her ability to *think* (Lehnerer, 1985, 21). From this anthropological position, Schleiermacher seeks to determine the nature of proper thinking. The main question is: How does one move from the relativity of thinking to the certainty of knowing? Since all thinking (which means every "taken something out of spatial-temporal reality") is relative, a final all-encompassing unity of thinking is required for knowledge to take place (Nealeigh, 1988, 180). Therefore, the general and metaphysical goal of Schleiermacher is to describe the presupposition of a transcendent basis for knowing. What, then, distinguishes true knowledge from mere thinking? Schleiermacher provides two criteria. First, *knowing* is thinking, which "is conceived in such a way that it could be produced in the same way by everyone possessing the ability to think". Second, true knowing is thinking, which "is conceived as corresponding to the being that is the object of thought" (ibid. 183). In short, Schleiermacher tries to validate the definition of knowledge as a *consensus between*

subjects as well as in terms of the connection between thinking and being, as a correspondence between thought and its object outside of us. Communication between individuals demands that knowledge is “real”; knowledge is always the result of a communicative process. However, analyzing thinking alone is not enough to explain how one moves from the relativity of thinking to the certainty of knowledge. This is why Schleiermacher gives us a transcendental basis for knowledge. He maintains that this basis between thinking and being can be found in the principle of absolute unity and identifies this absolute unity as God (Nealeigh, 1988, 187).

Dialectics and hermeneutics, as a kind of meta-science consider the preconditions of language, while the existence of language is a condition for the relationship between an individual and society. In what follows, we attempt to provide some insights as to how the questions of language are connected to those of individuality, and therefore again to those of education.

Language, Dialogue, and Subjectivity

Recalling the distinction made in the first section of this chapter, a starting point of dialectics is the assumption of a radical *similarity* across all thinkers, but at the same time, there is a radical *difference* in individual thinking. One of the central thoughts of dialectics is the individuality of every single speaker, which can never revert to the “universal” or “general”. Every individual is a unique “thinking being” (denkendes Sein) and “being thinking” (seiendes Denken). However, without contrasting positions, it would not be possible to seek uniqueness and identity.

During a discussion, individuals present their own unique ways of being and thinking. Yet, we have to assume that they have a common language that provides the medium for the dispute or dialogue in order to solve a point of contention. Linguistically, an agreement has to be reached both regarding the *contents* of the discussion and the *rules* concerning the dispute.

A fundamental dimension of understanding based on language, is the difference between the grammatical and psychological aspects of language. To describe these in short: grammatical, structural, and a relative constant usage of words make understanding in principle possible. Inside this structure, the individual has to find the tools to express herself. The grammatical dimension refers simply to the given logical or *grammatical meaning* (Bedeutung) or contents of the text. In other words, “grammatical interpretation aims at the objective understanding of speech”, as Parmentier (1989, 191) formulates it.

In the grammatical interpretation, a comparison will be done - the language used in a text will be compared with the sentences used in ordinary language. Every user of the language makes his own individual combination of the language. In this way, every speaker *reconstructs* language permanently. In speaking, one also manifests an “inner” meaning. The subject evokes the meaning (Sinn) of his own “inner world”. Exactly what this “given inner meaning” is, is something that cannot be revealed in a hermeneutical process – we cannot delve inside each other’s heads.

When understanding something grammatically, an individual is, in a way, a “tool of the language“, because during the process of interpretation, attention is first turned to the language and not so much to the person who is speaking.

Besides the grammatical structure of language, Schleiermacher speaks about the psychological dimension of language and psychological understanding. In this dimension, the general objective is secondary, and language, in a certain way, serves the speaker. Whereas grammatical understanding is not interested in the speaker, psychological understanding pays attention to the sense given by the speaker himself. Psychological understanding tries to identify the “real” or intended meaning of the speaker or writer. The interpreter attempts to find out the actual idea of the writer’s or speaker’s utterances. In many cases, this sense is not clear even to the speaker himself. Therefore, asking the author himself only leads to iteration: the interpreter has to understand the explanation, the explanation of the explanation, etc. In addition, the motives are mostly unconscious and the interpreter should actually listen to what has *not* been said or what the speaker is *not* conscious of (Parmentier, 1989, 194). At least this is a point where the interpreter is on slippery ice and is forced to lean on the psychoanalytical theory of unconsciousness.

There are also some problems arising in the field when thinking about *understanding* and *individuality*: any time one tries to describe with words and concepts the thinking of others, one has crossed the border of individuality. One could even say that understanding revokes the possibility of individuality. On the other hand, it is logically impossible to insist that *understanding* could not exist or would be impossible since, to be an individual, one needs the general. There is just no subjectivity without objectivity, no singularity without the general.

Finally, let us come back to the idea that hermeneutics and pedagogy meet at their very core question – that of individuality.

Understanding plays its most central role in the process of *Bildung*. In fact, the individual can *understand* herself only in linguistically transmitted reality. Even if the “birth” of subjectivity cannot be narrowed to linguistics as subjectivity already possesses, at a very elementary level, the possibility expressing its own uniqueness. At the most simple level, these forms of expression are like those of a small child, like “the thing over there”, “I” or “no”. With the first example (“the thing over there”), the child implies a distinction between himself and the world. With the words “Me” or “I”, he indicates the awareness of being an “Other” in relation to others. With the third example, “no”, the child shows his will in relation to foreign will (Mollenhauer, 1986, 124).

The special challenge for understanding lies obviously in its asymmetric character. Because the child has to be led through the linguistic conventions, it is not in an equal position to assess either the topic of the discussion or its rules. If this is correct, this does not exclude the possibility of mutual understanding; the rules of discussion will anyway be created by both participants. This means that even if the adult is linguistically more competent, every single situation will be reconstructed into a new special argument, dispute, or discussion – in a very Schleiermacherian sense of the word.

If we take the preconditions of understanding seriously, as they have been described in hermeneutics, it is easy to notice that the reality given for the educator is highly complicated, and any kind of systematical settings of rules or norms are impossible. The tension between the singular and the universal is the starting point of pedagogical practice. But it also remains a never-reachable goal of education when everyone continuously recreates this tension – at least not in the linguistic sense or linguistically.

Conclusion

Based on previous considerations concerning education as a mediating practice, what can we conclude?

A first conclusion is that the theory of *non-affirmative education and Bildung cannot revert to the theory of hermeneutics*. General hermeneutics, as described in this chapter, offer us tools for understanding what understanding and interpretation mean, in general. Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, focusing on interpretation and understanding linguistic expressions, reflect a distinct take on epistemology. However, Schleiermacher's hermeneutics exceed epistemology, e.g., by developing a theory of the self and self-awareness. Such a general theory, or philosophy, of human existence expressed by the dialectics between being, thinking, knowledge, and language contributes to our understanding the process of Bildung. It also highlights the dimensions of pedagogical dialogues.

However, although linguistic transmissions occur within a pedagogical relationship in which both educator and child constantly aim to express their understanding and intentions through language, and despite they interpret each other for finding out about others and themselves, hermeneutic theory of communication, interpretation, and understanding mediated by language is not a theory of education.

The second conclusion from this analysis would be that the *non-affirmative theory of education and Bildung cannot be thought beyond or as something distinct from hermeneutics*. Teaching in schools and other pedagogical institutions is based on curricula. In many countries, these curricula express quite detailed educational standards and other measurable goals. In this connection, hermeneutics operates as a reminder that education and Bildung are, ultimately, not processes that can be determined beforehand. Pedagogical processes operating through language ultimately originate in the participants interaction, which, due to its hermeneutic nature, is dependent on both parties. Regarding external expectations and curriculum, pedagogical work, as hermeneutics reminds us, cannot be expected to affirm these external interests. In fact, despite policies that would limit teachers' pedagogical degrees of freedom, the unique character of the pedagogical interaction escapes this external determination.

The third conclusion would be that *in hermeneutics there often exists an implicit a theory of pedagogical intervention*. From the perspective of non-affirmative education, hermeneutic reasoning does *not* mean that schools as an institution should

refrain from or avoid providing a perspective of reality. On contrary. Pedagogical institutions have to offer some perspectives on the world. In addition to learn about the world, teaching opens up the possibility of arguing from different starting points and understanding different worldviews. Such a hermeneutically contrasting pedagogy offers the learner the possibility to develop their own horizon, which means understanding their own position in relation to others.

To conclude, with the help of non-affirmative hermeneutic pedagogy, the individual is offered a critical distance from oneself in order to exceed or change their own position or correct their own practises.” To exceed” oneself or to redirect one’s thinking or emotions, is not trivial at all. Rather, these processes belong to the core of Bildung as they mark the process of identity. Exactly here lies the point, which can be described as *multilayered identity*: as the individual reflects on herself, thereby grasping the duplicity between” me” and” I”, the individual is, in principle and to a certain level, able to steer oneself and the own process of Bildung or the development of identity. This conclusion clearly echoes the notion of maturity, or *Mündigkeit* in the German Bildung tradition. On his question of what enlightenment is, Kant answers that it is “man’s exit from his self-inflicted immaturity”. Then, to “have the courage to use one’s own reason” means precisely to judge independently, even against authorities and given traditions and ways of thinking (Dörpinghaus et al., 2006, 63).

Such use of reason is both subjective and public, and reflects what in the first section of this chapter was referred to as an identity able to act self-formingly without losing oneself and a reflexive intersubjectivity as public discourse, living with continuously answering the open question of who we are, open for cultural change without dismissing history. In a non-teleological view of history and the future, Bildung presents itself as an unending task, a kind of perfection without the idea of perfectibility. Non-affirmative education, which aims to prepare for participation, is such a discourse.

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Part IV
Non-affirmative Education and
Empirical Research

Chapter 10

Pedagogical Experimentalism and the Principle of Verification. A Quest for Non-affirmative Educational Research



Hanno Su and Johannes Bellmann

Abstract Starting from the ongoing debate over whether education should take a non-affirmative stance towards reality, we pose the question of whether adopting a non-affirmative theory of education necessarily calls for a non-affirmative concept of educational research. We argue that dominant paradigms of both qualitative and quantitative research on education, respectively, assume a specific affirmative stance, which not only leads them to ignore the productive freedom of the practice of education that they investigate but also reproduces a dichotomy between education and research instead of inscribing themselves in the project of verification of the principles that are at stake in education. We do so by revisiting, first, Benner's early outline of Pedagogy as a practically experimenting science as an alternative to dominant research paradigms, second, Mollenhauer's critical pedagogy and its attempt to conceptualize non-affirmative educational research, and, third, Rancière's interventional empiricism with a particular focus on the concept of practical "verification." In this vein, we aim to contribute to the contemporary concept of non-affirmative educational research, which allows for a more precise understanding of the ways in which such an approach is at the same time affirmative with respect to the principles which are "verified" in the practice of education.

Keywords Educational research · Experiment · Emancipation · Research community · Pedagogy

Introduction

Throughout his work, Dietrich Benner has focused on a theory of non-affirmative education. Education is called affirmative when it functions either as an instrument of mere reproduction of a given society or as an instrument of the production of a

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© The Author(s) 2023
M. Uljens (ed.), *Non-affirmative Theory of Education and Bildung*,
Educational Governance Research 20,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30551-1_10

utopian future society. In both cases, “the goals and tasks of education are determined according to given positive purposes, which are supposed to serve as normative guidelines for education.” One starts from a real-existing, the other from a vicariously anticipated positivity. “Both positions rely on the instrumental concept of educational practice and see in it an important means of handing down or changing given positivities” (Benner, 2010, p. 142; transl. H.S./J.B.). While these two versions of affirmative education affirm the addressees of education with respect to an identity they are supposed to develop, there is yet another version of affirmative education that simply affirms the addressees as they already are. Thus, not only the broad instrumentalist normative education with reference to given or anticipated objectives but also the anti-pedagogical abandonment of educational addressing altogether can be regarded as affirmative: “If we affirm the child in need of education by denying the requirement to learn, we submit to its whims; if, on the other hand, we affirm the requirements to be put on it by judging it as not yet satisfying them, we subject it to our ideas of a normatively correct education.” (Benner, 1982, p. 954; transl. H.S./J.B.).

In the concept of non-affirmative education, however, “young people were not educated to affirm existing conditions or to affirm pedagogical actors as representatives of anticipated conditions. Instead, they must be enabled to participate in discourses on what is to be preserved and what is to be changed. Education that introduces such discourses can only be “non-affirmative.” Its aim is not to anticipate the results of the processes of *Bildung*. Instead, its aim is to introduce young people to an ongoing dispute that is to be settled, not only among the adults themselves but also between the generations” (Benner, 2022, p. 5). Thus, non-affirmative education means abandoning putting education in service of extra-pedagogical determinations (Benner, 2010, p. 142). For Benner, this does not mean a ban on affirmation in the practice of education; it rather intends to point out that in a *theory* of education, an affirmation of affirmations or negations is “methodically” inappropriate to orient pedagogical impacts on learning processes (see footnote 25, pp. 142–43).

In our discussion, we will raise questions concerning this argument. While acknowledging Benner’s rejection of instrumental concepts of education, we argue that he is less straightforward about how non-affirmative educational practice and research also need to leave room for “affirmation.” His critique of education in the service of *extra*-pedagogical determinations can be understood as if putting education in the service of *intra*-pedagogical determinations would be uncontroversial or even indispensable, i.e. if we understand free self-activity as an inner-pedagogical principle, it’s “affirmation” in terms of a “summons to free self-activity” does, indeed, not contradict a non-affirmative education properly understood. In fact, Benner’s concept of a “pedagogical transformation of external societal interests into legitimate pedagogical action” (Benner, 2022, p. 18) indicates that any extra-pedagogical determination has to be transformed into a legitimate intra-pedagogical determination. But Benner does not elaborate on this point in terms of a legitimate

form of affirmation.¹ The statement in the footnote cited above seems to use a different distinction, arguing that affirmation can be admitted in the practice of education but must be regarded as inappropriate for a theory of education that intends to orient practice. For us, this argument seems to be contradictory, since if educational theory lacks a legitimate place for affirmation, it cannot claim to orient educational practice, which simply cannot do without affirmations. Hence, the legitimate place for affirmation seems to be a blind spot in non-affirmative educational practice, theory, and research. The main thesis of this paper is that the practical verification of an indeterminate equal *Bildsamkeit* and free self-activity can be regarded as a legitimate and indispensable form of affirmation in a non-affirmative educational practice, as well as in educational theory and research.

In the following, we want to develop this argument by focusing on the question of what a non-affirmative theory of education means for our understanding of *educational research*. Is a non-affirmative theory of education necessarily calling for a non-affirmative concept of educational research, and what would such a concept look like? Although for Benner, a theory of non-affirmative education has always been center stage, he also reflected on and tried to develop approaches to educational *research* that he regarded as non-affirmative—from the early paper “Pädagogisches Experiment” (1972/1994) to his own more recent projects of empirical research in education as sketched in the introduction to this volume. Reflecting on his own projects, Benner declares: “One of the non-affirmative aspects of the research concepts outlined above is that, in all three variants, they neither colonize action theory structures rooted in the intrinsic logic of pedagogical practice nor immunize research against criticism with reference to paradigm-specific norms and self-evident features [...]. Rather, they seek to bring action theory and paradigmatically proven research into an exchange that avoids uniform conceptions of theory and empiricism and focuses on the further development of educational practice and the optimization of education science research” (Benner, 2022, pp. 32–33).

Throughout his work, we find a pervasive optimism that a productive exchange of action theory and paradigmatically proven research is possible. His “General Pedagogy” ends with a short chapter on “the basic structure of educational research.” Here, Benner sketches competing research paradigms in education, namely empirical-analytic, historical-hermeneutic, and ideology-critical approaches, and their different understandings of critique. In fourth place Benner mentions an action-theoretical approach as developed in his work, which is not characterized as a *research* paradigm next to the ones mentioned before but as an “action-theoretical discourse” (Benner, 2010, p. 324, transl. H.S./J.B.), which entails a theory of

¹The recent debate on a “post-critical pedagogy” has pointed out that approaches of critical pedagogy failed to see any legitimacy for an “affirmative attitude” claiming “that there are principles to defend” (Hodgson et al., 2017, p. 15). From our view, this pledge for a “principled normativity” seems to be a promising approach if it is further elaborated with reference to genuine pedagogical principles. In the “Manifesto for a Post-Critical Pedagogy,” however, it is our impression that the authors do not focus the affirmation of certain principles but the task is rather described as “to affirm that there is good in the world that is worth preserving” (ibid., p. 19).

Erziehung, a theory of Bildung and a theory of educational institutions. While arguing within this action-theoretical discourse, “General Pedagogy” nevertheless hopes to be connectable to different paradigms of educational research. This, however, depends, as Benner (2010, p. 325) declares, on whether these paradigms themselves leave room for the action-theoretical questions as developed in his seminal work.

To be sure, we do not want to deny the very possibility of productive interrelations between a non-affirmative theory of education and different paradigms of educational research. Nevertheless, we want to argue that dominant paradigms of research on education, both quantitative and qualitative, do not leave room for action-theoretical questions of non-affirmative education. As they lack a developed theory of their subject matter, i.e., education as a specific non-affirmative practice, they also lack the prerequisite to holding instrumentalist demands at bay.² Moreover, we hold that dominant research paradigms in education are themselves affirmative since research is either used as a mere representation of the field of education as it is or as an instrument of its reform in the name of predetermined objectives. Both forms of affirmative research on education do not only ignore the productive freedom of the practice they investigate; they also reproduce a dichotomy between education and research instead of inscribing themselves in the project of verification of the principles that are at stake in education.

First, we try to make plausible why dominant research paradigms on education can be regarded as affirmative. Second, we revisit Benner’s early outline of Pedagogy as a practically experimenting science as an alternative to dominant research paradigms. For discussing in what way this approach can still be adequately grasped by the distinction of affirmative/non-affirmative, we, thirdly, draw attention to Mollenhauer’s critical pedagogy and its attempt to conceptualize non-affirmative educational research. As the most radical alternative to dominant research paradigms, we finally discuss Jacques Rancière’s interventional empiricism with a particular focus on the concept of practical “verification”. Summing up, we argue that by drawing on Rancière, we can not only develop a contemporary concept of non-affirmative educational research; we can also be more precise in what way such an approach is at the same time affirmative with respect to the principles which are “verified” in the practice of education.

Mainstream Research on Education

Following John Elliott (2006), we start with the distinction between *research on education* and *educational research*. What nowadays is acknowledged as “research” in the field of education—both quantitative and qualitative—can be characterized as research on education. *Research on education* “aspires to produce ‘objective

²Uljens and Ylimaki (2017, p. 15) made a similar observation regarding research on “educational leadership,” which, oddly enough, to a large extent lacks an elaborated theory of *education* as the “object” of any educational leadership.

knowledge' about practice in classrooms and schools by adopting the position of an impartial spectator who transcends the evaluative perspectives of education practitioners. Such a position is presumed to be a condition for describing and explaining what is *really* going on in institutions of education" (p. 170; emp. original). In contrast to this, *educational research* is characterized by its "practical intention to realize educational values in action. It addresses practical questions and, in doing so, cannot avoid taking an evaluative stance on the aims of education. In this view, it is a form of inquiry aimed at the formation of practical insights and judgments. Since these are rooted in the everyday experiences of education practitioners, educational research constitutes a form of commonsense inquiry rather than a science" (pp. 169–70). A similar way to draw this distinction is to connect research on education with an objective approach and educational research with an interested approach (Biesta, 2020, pp. 93–94). Still another way to describe both approaches is Eugen Fink's (1978, p. 33) distinction between ascertaining science and design science (feststellende und entwerfende Wissenschaft), which helps to see that—irrespective of their paradigmatic opposition—both empirical-analytical and historical-hermeneutic approaches can be regarded as versions of ascertaining science.

Before we discuss the prospects of educational research that Elliott, like Benner, depicts as a "practical science" (Elliott, 2006, p. 173), we turn to mainstream research on education. The purpose here is not to provide an overview of the vast variety of research on education with regard to its methodological paradigms and disciplinary backgrounds. Rather, we try to point out some common traits of mainstream research on education by using Benner's distinction between affirmative and non-affirmative education and transferring it—by analogy—to research. We are aware that, in a certain sense, this analogy is bold, since of course there are essential differences between the practice of education and the practice of research. Nevertheless, it seems fitting since in both cases you can take the central term of (non-)affirmative as characterizing certain *positionings* (Davies & Harré, 1990)—be it of educators towards students or of researchers towards "the field." We would like to argue that in this regard, mainstream research on education—both empirical-analytical and hermeneutical-reconstructive—is predominantly characterized by affirmative positionings towards the field.

In *empirical-analytical approaches*, we find the widespread understanding that research on education has to provide the relevant knowledge base for reforms in education, i.e., the description of the initial state before the reform, the recommendation of aims and measures, and the evaluation of effects (Prenzel & Heiland, 1985, p. 49). This technological understanding of research on education (Bildungsforschung) was articulated well before the upswing of evidence-based education. Interestingly, it is grounded on an alleged analogy between education and research on education: both are supposedly dealing with the transformation of an initial state into a target state (ibid., p. 50). Not only education itself but also education reform is understood as a rational action. In both cases, one has to obtain the relevant knowledge *before* realizing a measure.

In this technological approach, research on education claims to provide the necessary evidence base for rational action both in education and in education reform.

This positioning of research on education vis-à-vis educational practice already contains a devaluation of practitioners' practical knowledge, which is considered to be not yet scientifically enlightened knowledge about education. Occasionally, research on education even considers this knowledge as mere "ersatz knowledge" (van Ackeren et al., 2013, p. 56; transl. H.S./J.B.), which is based on "intuition" and "personal preferences" (ibid.) rather than evidence. The ideal to strive for, then, is for school leaders, teachers, and other professional educators to have a strong orientation towards scientific "evidence" combined with a low orientation towards "ersatz knowledge" (ibid., p. 57). The devaluation of practitioners' practical knowledge as "ersatz knowledge" is also justified by its alleged conservative character, while the reference to scientific knowledge is generally associated with the critical questioning of the respective practices (cf. Kuper & Muslic, 2012).

In any case, there is the widespread assumption that scientific knowledge, which is considered authoritative, is not and cannot be generated by the educational practice itself. In this view, it is therefore (tacitly) accepted that educational practice remains permanently dependent on the knowledge production of research. The positioning of research on education in relation to educational practice thus takes on paternalistic features. Because of its assumed superior perspective, it claims to be the decisive authority in the discourse on educational quality and quality development. If it encounters indifference or even resistance in educational practice, it can take this as further evidence of its prior conviction that educational practice is in desperate need of scientific expert knowledge.

Research on education in this understanding decidedly intends to "get practical" (Prenzel & Heiland, 1985, p. 50; transl. H.S./J.B.) by changing the educational world for the better. Therefore, research on education typically starts with a critique of educational practice in its present state of affairs by detecting certain shortcomings and comparing these shortcomings with the performances of other individuals, organizations, or systems. In the ideal case, this mode of research develops causal theories about differences in performance. Research, then, is considered verified if, on the basis of causal theories, effective interventions can be demonstrated. But even if causal mechanisms cannot be secured, evaluations can take effect just by comparison and feedback (Bellmann, 2016). In any case, the scientific evaluation is made within a framework of given standards that are known before rational action is taken. Thus, it represents a form of *external critique* (Jaeggi, 2014, pp. 261–62).

Although this understanding of research on education is critical, it is at the same time affirmative when judged by a non-affirmative theory of educational research. Transforming an initial state into a target state known in advance is affirmative, both in the case of education and research. It passes over the self-activity and productive freedom of practitioners and turns them into mere executive bodies for external directives. Thus, research in education entails a positioning towards the field, which at the same time devaluates practical knowledge and authorizes scientific knowledge. It is not only affirmative but also paternalistic because it claims to have superior knowledge of the field and the means to produce this superior knowledge. In this way, it establishes a relationship between research on education and "the field," in which the latter is locked in a permanent dependency.

Hermeneutic-reconstructive approaches to research on education differ significantly from empirical-analytical approaches since they usually refrain from any claims for improving education practice through research. Rather, they aim to describe or reconstruct certain features of pedagogical practice or the implicit orientations of practitioners. These approaches usually seek to represent the educational world, but they do not have the intention to change it. Such research might claim to explicate the implicit knowledge of practitioners, yet it nevertheless leaves everything as it is. It simply tries to *reconstruct* how practitioners interactively construct the educational world they inhabit. In this sense, hermeneutic-reconstructive research on education is also regarded as a second-order construction (Bohnsack, 2014, p. 25).

At first sight, this positioning toward the field seems to be more modest than that of empirical-analytical approaches. Researchers do not claim to have better knowledge or a “higher rationality” (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2021, p. 355) than those investigated. But, nevertheless, the researchers’ distinct ability to explicate establishes a particular power relation in interpretative research (Hametner, 2013, p. 142). The assumption is that those investigated do have the relevant knowledge that keeps the educational world going, but they only have it implicitly. Basically, this implies that they do not know what they know (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2021, p. 355). In this view, implicit knowledge drives educational practice without practitioners being aware of it. In contrast to empirical-analytical approaches, hermeneutic-reconstructive approaches do not claim any epistemic dependency on the field. Nevertheless, the power of interpretation establishes a split between those who interpret and who are interpreted. Here, researchers do not intend to let practitioners participate in the interpretation of research material. It is even recommended, not to communicate results to those in the field because confronting them with a different perspective on their practice might cause confusion among them (*ibid.*, p. 102).

Thus, hermeneutic-reconstructive approaches deal with a “Hinterwelt of meaning” (Brinkmann, 2015, p. 533; transl. H.S./J.B.; “eine Hinterwelt des Sinns”), a deep structure of meaning that generates practice but which, at the same time, remains hidden to those who practice. John Elliott also points out this constitutive split between the explicators and the explicated: “Although many qualitative researchers focused on situations and events from the standpoint of their meaning for those involved, they employed second-order theoretical constructs to explain these meanings. Their research findings tended to suggest that things were not as they appeared to participants because they were unaware of the social, economic, and political factors that inevitably condition their commonsense constructions of meaning. With varying degrees of explicitness, a great deal of qualitative research in the field claims to have penetrated to a level of reality that is hidden from the view of participants” (Elliott, 2006, p. 177).

Hermeneutic-reconstructive approaches are *affirmative* in a different sense than empirical-analytical approaches. Whereas the latter, as we have seen, are affirmative in forming target outcomes of education, the former is affirmative in the sense that they refrain from “getting practical” in the field and leave everything as it is. Although both approaches differ in terms of their claim to improvement, they share

a certain picture of research “as an activity aimed at discovering essential truths about a reality that lies beyond how the world appears to those engaged in the practical pursuits of everyday life” (Elliott, 2006, p. 178). Both are research on education that shares an “objectivist view of the ‘objects’ of research” (Kemmis, 2012, p. 891), be it things independent of the mind (like causal mechanisms) or things of the mind (like first order constructions). Against this backdrop of mainstream research on education, we will now turn to the question of how non-affirmative educational research might look like.

Pedagogical Experimentalism

Benner’s early paper, “Pedagogical Experiment” (1972/1994) represents an important contribution in the direction of non-affirmative educational research. The contemporary context of Benner’s paper is the widely discussed dualism between historical-hermeneutic and empirical-analytic approaches and the emergence of an emancipatory pedagogy as a possible resolution of this dualism (Benner, 1973/2001, pp. 273–74). Although Benner acknowledges that contemporary approaches to emancipatory pedagogy rightly regard education science as a *practical science* (ibid., p. 274), he articulates several reservations towards emancipatory pedagogy. Among them was its inability to successfully establish education science as a practical research discipline, which—for Benner—results from adhering to a technical understanding of experiments and a hermeneutical concept of communication (ibid., p. 317).³ In his book “Hauptströmungen der Erziehungswissenschaft” [Main Directions of Education Science], Benner presents his own approach as a solution to those problems which emancipatory pedagogy has left unsolved. The methodological heart of this solution is the outline of a specific pedagogical experimentalism in the final chapter of this book, which draws on central parts of the paper from 1972.

Similar to *action research*—but obviously without any explicit references to it—Benner sketches a genuine mode of “pedagogical empiricism” within a broader picture of educational research (ibid., 114). Such a pedagogical empiricism is not presented as replacing the hermeneutic or analytic approaches of mainstream research on education. Rather, it is an essential supplement and hinge point without which the results of hermeneutic and analytic approaches remain unconnected to pedagogical experience. For Benner, “one of the most urgent tasks of the present” (p. 110) is to conceptualize “practical-empirical educational research” (p. 101; eine “praktisch-erfahrungswissenschaftliche Erziehungsforschung”) as distinct from, but related to, hermeneutic and analytic approaches. The heart of such a “practical

³Within emancipatory pedagogy, Benner credits Mollenhauer with having developed the most nuanced understanding of social-practical experiments (1973/2001, p. 311). We will come back to this point in Chap. 3.

science” (ibid.) is the development of specific “research methods for a practical empiricism” (p. 110), namely a distinct pedagogical experimentalism.

Benner is well aware of the different traditions of experimentalism in the history of education. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, we find the idea of technical-experimental research on education among founders of educational psychology such as Meumann and Lay. In his own defense of experimentalism, however, Benner draws on a different tradition of pedagogical experimentalism, in which the idea of pedagogy as an experimental practical science was developed in close relation to practical reforms in education. For Kant, for instance, the Philanthropinum Dessau was a concrete contemporary example of generic pedagogical experimentalism (pp. 83–84). In the same way, Peter Petersen developed his idea of a pedagogical ‘Tatsachenforschung’ in close relation to the *Jenaplanschule*, as a reform experiment (p. 89). Benner considers Petersen’s approach as groundbreaking for a “truly pedagogical empiricism” (p. 106; transl. H.S./J.B.).⁴

When Benner took up the idea of pedagogical experiments in 1972, it was risky since pedagogy, once a practical science, was about to turn into a technical discipline (p. 79). Against this background, a first and decisive step in Benner’s line of argument was the distinction between a *technical* and a *practical* experiment for which he draws on his academic teacher, Erich Heintel. A technical experiment seeks to gain causal knowledge about some subject matter or problem that can be turned into potential technical applications of this knowledge. The meaning of these applications, however, is located outside of the experiment. A practical experiment, on the contrary, is situated within the horizon of motivated conjoined action, which transcends the horizon of technical applications in two ways: On the one hand, in a practical experiment, those involved in the experiment deliberate about the meaning of technical applications. On the other hand, the subject matter or problem is investigated, even when or where it is not available in a technical way (p. 81). Any particular practical experiment again is *partial* and located within the *total experiment* of the human transformation of self and world (p. 83). The latter point is crucial because it demonstrates that reforming the school is neither possible nor desirable without reforming society (p. 107). To put it in Dewey’s terms, Experimentalism encompasses education *and* democracy. In Benner’s words, [s]eparating experiments in education as partial experiments from a “total experiment” in society will likely serve to disguise societal contradictions rather than to solve them (ibid.).

Benner uses both distinctions (technical/practical; partial/total) for sharp criticism of the contemporary understanding of pedagogical experiments. With reference to the distinction between a technical and a practical experiment, Benner observes that “[w]here experimentation is [actually] going on, be it in politics or education, it is technical experiments that prevail; in each case, the aim of experimentation is presupposed without question” (p. 86; transl. H.S./J.B.). With

⁴Benner has studied Petersen in great detail, while references to John Dewey are absent from his early works. As we know, however, that Petersen studied Dewey’s work (Retter, 2009, p. 164), Benner’s remarkable early paper, “Pedagogical Experiment,” might show some indirect influence of pragmatic experimentalism.

reference to the distinction between partial and total experiments, Benner's diagnosis is that, in the case of partial experiments, all attention is absorbed by the question of under what conditions the experiments can be optimized, while the growing questionability of the broader horizon within which these experiments take place is surpassed by repairs that stabilize the system (p. 86).

On this basis, Benner finally develops a structural model for educational research in which educational theory, practical experiments, and practical empirical research are coordinated. The structural model is depicted in a figure that can be read as a cyclical problematization of practice (p. 114). At first glance, this looks similar to empirical-analytical approaches and their external critiques of practice. In Benner's structural model, however, the relation of theory both to practice and to empirical research is not understood in terms of verification or falsification (p. 108). First, practice is oriented but not regimented by theory (p. 109). Hereby, Benner points out a "pedagogical difference" (p. 109, transl. H.S./J.B.) between theory and practice that entails both relationship and differentiation. Theory can guide practice but practice cannot be deduced from theory. It is the unalienable task of practitioners who bear responsibility in concrete situations to mediate between theoretical orientations for meaningful action, on the one hand, and the practical realization of plans for action that are critically oriented in this way, on the other hand (Benner, 1973/2001, p. 330). Due to the pedagogical difference, pedagogical experiments always have the character of a risk ("Wagnischarakter"; *ibid.*). And trying to overcome this risk by establishing a linear relationship between theory and practice (or empirical research and practice, for that matter) would be equal to negating the very possibility of practical experiments in education. Educational theory, for Benner, is a theory of an experimenting practice (*ibid.*) while making a distinction between *pedagogical* and *educational* experiments. Pedagogical experiments are directed to the transformation of the institutional framework, which is conducive to educational experiments (*ibid.*, p. 331).

Second, Benner understands the relation of theory to empirical research neither in terms of verification or falsification. Rather, theory needs practical empirical research to get in contact with the way in which theory becomes practically relevant by the mediation of practice. At the same time, the theoretically oriented experimental practice needs empirical research to get in contact with its own consequences. Although Benner has reservations against the cybernetic idea of a feedback loop (*ibid.*, p. 326), a functional equivalent is center stage in his own structural model for educational research. It is the pragmatist idea of enabling a reflective experience ("Rückerfahrung," *ibid.*, p. 330) by getting in contact with the consequences of one's own practice. Practical empirical research, as Benner envisions it, functions as a means of making a reflective experience possible—both in theory and practice. It allows theory to reflect on its own practical relevance in its mediation by the field, and it allows the practice to problematize its own understanding (Benner, 1972/1994, p. 109).

In contrast to mainstream versions of research on education, Benner's concept of educational research is *non-affirmative* in two ways. First, it does not establish an instrumental relation between research and practice as it is pervasive in

empirical-analytical approaches. Rather, it is the pedagogical difference (between theory and practice and between research and practice) that provides room for an experimental practice whose pedagogical relevance can only be determined by those involved in these experiments. Theory and research are both important factors within this process of sense-making, yet they are not able to determine it. Second, educational research is non-affirmative since it is far from leaving everything as it is. Rather, it intervenes in educational reality in order to make it conducive for educational experiments. This interventionism, however, is indirect since it seeks to transform the institutional framework for education as an experimental practice in its own right.

We want to ask two critical questions here. The first one concerns indirect interventionism. Cautious as it might be, it establishes a hierarchy between those who experiment with the context and those who experiment within. While it must be admitted that there is some division of labor between education, educational policy, and research, more radical conceptions of action research would claim that these and other different practices build an interconnected “practice architecture” (Kemmis, 2012, p. 886) so that pedagogical experiments presuppose some joint attention and shared responsibility for consequences within these architectures. This political understanding of pedagogical experiments is not only appropriate for democratic societies but also for a democratic education that has a “double purpose”: “the formation and transformation of selves and societies” (ibid., p. 894).

The second critical question refers to the structural model for educational research that suggests that the process of “problematization of practice” is in some way theory-driven. In any case, an educational theory is considered the starting point of this process, both from theory to practice and from theory to empiricism (Benner, 1972/1994, p. 114). In contrast to this, a pragmatist position would argue that the starting point for any problematization of practice would be the practice itself. Although Benner’s structural model emphasizes the relationship of theory, research and practice, there seems to be a bias for the theoretical point of view and a surpassing of the practitioners’ perspectives (Sesink, 2015, p. 32).

It is interesting to note that Benner not only developed a structural model for educational research with the pedagogical experiment as its crucial element but that, some years later, he (together with Jörg Ramseger) also was involved in a pedagogical experiment of/in a primary school that was accompanied by a research project from the University of Münster. In the final report about this reform experiment, we can notice a more radical view on pedagogical experimentalism that also addresses the critical questions mentioned above. Here, researchers and practitioners were seen as a community of experimenters, which reflect together on the consequences of their experimental practice. “Already the choice of the objects of observation makes it clear that the accompanying research in the primary school project is oriented towards a concept of experience which is under the primacy of practice. The practical staff members are not executing organs of theoretical designs, and the scientific staff members do not primarily seek knowledge for the sake of theory. Rather, all staff members contribute their respective qualifications to the joint attempt to combine the development of an action-oriented concept with research into pedagogical practice in the sense of a permanent correction of the

concept by practice and of practice by the concept” (Benner & Ramseger, 1981, p. 185; transl. H.S./J.B.).

This remarkable example of (participatory) action research is non-affirmative in a still different sense: It not only refutes both instrumental relationships between research and practice and a detached spectator perspective of research on practice that leaves everything as it is; moreover, it disrupts a widespread hierarchy between researchers and practitioners and verifies an unconventional *equality* between them. Both sides are seen as “equal partners” (ibid., 185) in the attempt to improve education and to interpret what improvement in education means. In the following, we will discuss whether this positioning of educational research can still adequately be grasped by the distinction affirmative/non-affirmative or whether we rather have to acknowledge that a non-affirmative positioning towards ‘the field’ at the same entails some kind of affirmation in terms of verification.

Critical Pedagogy and the Researching Community

During a symposium to mark Mollenhauer’s passing, Benner addresses a question originally posed to him by Mollenhauer: Can education in the sense of *Bildung* be understood without any normative connotations of the opposition “affirmative vs. critical” (Benner, 2000b, pp. 103–5). Benner argues here that this distinction is essential for any critical theory of *Bildung*, as in view of the indeterminacy of *Bildsamkeit* educational practices can never simply affirm societal demands but have to transform them into developmental tasks that, because of their openness, can in principle never be affirmative of what is already there. And, as we have seen, the same goes for practical experiments in educational research. Mollenhauer, too, is working on the elaboration of specific research methods for educational scholarship, and, as already indicated, both of them argue for a non-affirmative theory of education (Benner, 2000a, p. 41). Moreover, Benner explicitly praises the later Mollenhauer for having won back spaces for non-affirmative education from (overly) rationalistic approaches. Benner also shares Mollenhauer’s specific understanding of critique as being formulated both in “the name of and in ignorance of a better education” (ibid., p. 34).⁵

⁵ Still, they seem to differ in their respective emphases on the role educational practice plays in educational research. In his later work, Mollenhauer spent a good amount of time trying to find a language for what is happening in education practically (Mollenhauer, 1983/2014, p. 2). This appears to be a reworking of the *reconstructive tradition*. Benner’s practical approach to education, however, seems to have it just the other way around, when he is focusing on how ideas of education can become practical (in the sense of theoretically oriented sense making and managing of real-life situations) or on how educational research can become practical experience (Benner, 1972/1994, p. 109). This is rather a reworking of the *evaluative tradition*. This may be a matter of nuances, but it helps to point out that in both senses, the reduction of our understanding of the relationship between research and practice to the one-way street represented in the question of how research can change practice is to be avoided.

Talking about education from a practical view, Benner's strength seems to be understanding education in terms of negativity, i.e., its inherent potential to mark the limits of the real. For Benner, education cannot shake off its negative core structure, i.e., it is never emancipation to something but always emancipation from something (Benner, 2000a, p. 36). Education "does not argue in terms of positive progress, but in recognizing the negativity of successful emancipation" (ibid., p. 35). Although Benner is speaking about the human condition of not positively knowing about the future, it is rather Mollenhauer's pedagogy that is better suited for the concretization of this dimension. For Mollenhauer, education rests on acknowledging the capacity to draw the distinction between the actual and the possible, or, as he put it in more pedagogical terms, between what is the case at the present and what could be possible now or would be possible in the future (Mollenhauer, 1983/2014, p. 125). But, for him, it is not just educational practice that centers around this distinction, but also educational research—albeit he elaborated the latter aspect to a lesser degree.

In his earlier book on emancipatory education ("Emanzipation und Erziehung"), Mollenhauer picks up a central idea from Schleiermacher's lectures on pedagogy, in which society is understood starting with the problem of its continuation given the succession of generations. "If it is true," Mollenhauer writes, elaborating on this basic thought, "that society is not a phenomenon of mere repetition, then it is the task of pedagogy—both as practice and as theory—to engender [*hervorbringen*] the potential of societal change in the adolescent generation" (Mollenhauer, 1968/1970, p. 66; transl. and emp. H.S./J.B.). Obviously, the educational scope of this passage relies on how "engendering" is to be understood, and Mollenhauer's choice of words ("*hervorbringen*") is rather vague. Educationally, it makes a huge difference whether it is interpreted more along the unidirectional lines of the adult generation yielding, generating, producing, or even causing this capacity for change in the younger generation; or whether it is understood as giving rise to, bringing forth, or—maybe most accurately—bringing out in the adolescent generation their capacity for change.

What is most interesting, though, is how Mollenhauer sees this exposition as a task that is essential to both educational practice and *research*. So, as the discussion of the practical side should not be our focus here, we can turn directly to the hints Mollenhauer gives us to conceptualize educational research in these terms. On a closer look, the introduction to his seminal collection of essays, forming "*Erziehung und Emanzipation*," which became known for Mollenhauer's pointed (and hugely successful) attempt to position Critical Pedagogy in the field of educational research, offers a promising but less noticed deliberation of an experimental stance. This is of great interest here—not only because it is picked up very favorably by Benner in connection with his account of pedagogical experiments (Benner, 1973/2001, p. 311).

Like Benner, Mollenhauer seems to react to the same problem: the growing influence of the rather technological research style of the natural sciences on empirical research in education (Mollenhauer, 1968/1970, p. 11; 13). Instead of just reverting to what at that time was deemed mere philosophical speculation, both authors want

to hold on to some form of *empirical educational research*. But whereas Benner opts for the path to reinterpret what an experiment is, Mollenhauer's main angle—even though he explicitly talks about practical experiments in society, as well (*ibid.*, p. 20)—seems to be a reinterpretation of social research via a shift of what *participant observation* is.

In a later, rather technical book on methods for educational research, Mollenhauer (together with Rittelmeyer) speaks of the common differentiation of grades of participation ranging from an identification with a social role without any distance all the way to a mere uninvolved spectator (Mollenhauer & Rittelmeyer, 1977, pp. 153–4). Eventually, this leads to the exposition of the epistemic problems of objectivity and the ethical implications of interfering with practice. However, in terms of political enlightenment, there are not only discussions about the will for change and taking a practical stance in and through research against present hierarchies (*ibid.*, p. 159; 161). There are also hints at how being an observer is first and foremost a social role, a role that might as well be taken on without any scientific or research interest (*ibid.*, p. 154). Both these aspects are important for the question of how to understand educational experiments in terms of their social nexus.

In a slight, but a very insightful shift of wording, Mollenhauer suggests a research mode he calls “participating observation (*beteiligte Beobachtung*)” (Mollenhauer, 1968/1970, p. 20). Other than the traditional participant observation [*teilnehmende Beobachtung*] emphasizing mainly physically taking part, the determining attribute “*beteiligt*” transports the meaning of involvement or concern. Still, at first glance, this remains an expression of the importance of *empirical research in education*. This position, however, serves also as a reminder of the influence the humanistic tradition (*Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik*) of characterizing pedagogy as *reflexion engagée* (Flitner, 1957/1958, p. 18)—as engaged and involved theorizing—had on Mollenhauer. But, as he, in the same vein, speaks of “political involvement [*politische Beteiligung*]” (Mollenhauer, 1968/1970, p. 162), this also expresses his own stance as a main proponent of *Critical Pedagogy* and political emancipation. So, in just these two words, *beteiligte Beobachtung*, Mollenhauer combines, even merges, all three of the major research traditions of his time.

Conceptually, this subtle shift bears the potential to open anew a conversation about the involvements of educational research, i.e., what it is involved in and who is involved in it. Besides the formal broadening (i.e., you can be an involved observer, e.g., with historical matters, even though you are not a participant yourself!), it allows us to embed educational research into a social or communal framework. This counters the habitual research practice of treating “study participants” as matters of fact and, effectively making them, as Latour puts it, into a “dispensable crowd” (Latour, 2004, p. 246), instead of being offered “arenas in which to gather” (*ibid.*). Based on the conviction of the principle of an “*equal participating involvement* of everybody in the process of societal change” (Mollenhauer, 1968/1970, p. 51; transl. and emp. H.S./J.B.), which Mollenhauer imagines taking place in a “practical community of experimentation” (*ibid.*, p. 20), a “multifarious inquiry” (Latour, 2004, p. 246) is launched, in which “new complexes of meaning are created, and new orientations for action are trialed” (Mollenhauer, 1968/1970, p. 20).

The experimental critic as “one who assembles” (Latour, 2004, p. 246) is in a certain way related to Benner’s research program of working towards orienting our practical understanding (Benner, 1972/1994, p. 82); however, it adds the orientation introduced by asking who is *taking part* in these practical experiments.⁶ With Mollenhauer, we can understand this not only as somewhat esoteric research in and for educational practice but explicitly as raising the question of involvement in academic practice and discourse, i.e., of who is included as an actor in educational research. Who has not just an external (practical) role or “a supplementary [or] an empty part” (Rancière, 2004, p. 305), which might not count as equal? Who counts as an educational researcher? Who speaks in educational research and who is dispensable? Who counts, and who is being counted?

As a consequence, the *participating* research of an experimenting community is most certainly not social change instilled from the outside. Nevertheless, from our perspective, Mollenhauer seems to have a limited understanding of the emancipatory interest of educational research. Granted, similarly to Benner, Mollenhauer writes against reductions of educational thought to the techniques of the natural sciences by arguing that innocent-sounding claims of science explaining reality and informing about it are just other means to dissect educational practice, to the effect of its mastery (Mollenhauer, 1968/1970, pp. 11–13). In addition to simply being a limited form of inquiry, it bears the danger of preparing knowledge to be used for the mastery and dominance of people (*ibid.*, p. 16). Nevertheless, Mollenhauer seems to still organize his critique around a similar image: the disclosing function of educational research and practice, for the purposes of “liberation from uncomprehended dependency” (*ibid.*, p. 20) and “enhancing transparency, enlightenment, [and] rationality of educational action” (*ibid.*, p. 17).

Although we do find some interesting hints for both experimental and communal educational research in Mollenhauer’s text, this eventual retraction to a base layer of subject philosophy leaves us with important questions regarding the exact scope of these forms of inquiry. *First*, despite the groundbreaking talk about an “experimenting community,” Mollenhauer’s pedagogico-epistemic framework heavily relies on the figure of the autonomous subject. In the spirit of the Critical Pedagogy of that time, he “locates the problem of emancipation in consciousness binding itself to rationality” (*ibid.*, p. 10), ultimately aiming at the “liberation of subjects” (*ibid.*, p. 11). Much later, Mollenhauer even criticizes Benner’s reliance on the concept of practice, since Benner is not able to account for subjective (aesthetic) sensations and experiences (Mollenhauer, 1990, p. 482). *Secondly*, and probably more to the point of our argument, Mollenhauer’s approach broadly inherits the classical hermeneutic research perspective oriented towards reconstructing and understanding the past and, therefore, lacks a clear and elaborated concept of future-oriented research—except for maybe the interesting insinuations picked up above.

⁶This is a somewhat different orientation than Kemmis’, who in his concept of “research within practice traditions” is basically asking how practitioners can develop a research stance in their own “space of practice” (Kemmis, 2012, p. 894).

Similarly, Mollenhauer misses out on explicitly encompassing this dimension of future-oriented creativity, which he elaborates on in terms of self-formation, in his epistemological reflections—despite his influential emphasis that “detours” (Mollenhauer, 1986) through non-scientific, i.e., literary, artistic, and autobiographic renderings of education, are necessary in order to find new and more accurate ways of talking about education. Instead, he somehow loses sight of the communal dimension of research that he pointed out earlier and then gets lost in the subject-philosophic and hermeneutic undergrowth of understanding others under the condition of radical alienness and ineffability (Friesen, 2015, p. 113). As we shall see below, it is Rancière who, in terms of practical verification, radicalizes this poetic shift from cognizing, or scientific knowledge production of *what is*, to explore *what could be*. After all, it is precisely this aspect of future-orientedness that formally distinguishes verification in the sense of recognition of the equal capacity for involvement in social change from any representationalist concept of verification. But to properly understand these connections and the poetic or creative moment of educational research (in contrast to knowledge production), we need to take a little detour ourselves.

Verification as a Principle of Emancipatory Research

In educational discourse, there is a tendency—to which the authors of this paper contributed, as well (Su & Bellmann, 2021)—to employ a somewhat literal reading of Rancière’s *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* as a lesson about emancipatory education. In accordance with the above shift from Benner’s non-affirmative education to a notion of non-affirmative research, there should, however, also be room to connect to the book’s main idea in its intended sense as a parable of emancipatory research written against certain ways of academic research (e.g., Pelletier, 2012, p. 100).⁷ Against the philosopher or researcher imposing their supposedly greater knowledge of how things are, which essentially is a way to incapacitate most members of society from knowing, this presents an interesting deviant way to understand educational research.

In contrast to those epistemic regimes, which are based on a claim to first *depict* reality and then intend to change or preserve it, we can highlight a certain shift in how we understand the relation of research to the world it examines. Asking what it means to affirm or not affirm, we turn to Rancière’s philosophical *method or path*⁸ *of verification*. Rather than thinking of verification as complimentary to falsification, i.e., as a process of checking certain theoretical models against reality, for Rancière, verification is a twofold form of inquiry: intervention and invention

⁷In fact, Rancière’s reference to Bourdieu as the “sociologist king” suggests just this reading.

⁸For Rancière, methods are not something you follow but are the paths that are constructed by inquiry: “A method means a path: not the path that a thinker follows but the path he or she constructs” (Rancière, 2009, p. 114). Following methods, like following moral commandments from others (Kant, Arendt), has nothing to do with emancipatory inquiry.

(Rancière, 2009, p. 114, 2017, p. 735). As we shall see, the combination of these two aspects entails an understanding of verifying research that is specifically not based on affirming certain cultural contents but on the continuous affirmation of taking a disruptive stance (in the name of equality), i.e., the disruption of the system of what counts as just.

On the one hand, every inquiry *itself* is an *intervention*. To make sense of this emphasis, we have to remind ourselves of the background against which the Rancièrian principle of verification is formulated. Under the influence of the paradigm of the natural sciences, it has become somewhat of a standard model for empirical research techniques to think of the process of research in a representationalist way as being separated from the observed facts and things and hence—ideally—void of any interference with the examined entities. Just the opposite of Benner’s understanding of practical experiments, in such a way of looking at things, any intervention—if at all—takes place in an applicatory form, “without questioning the applicatory relation itself” (Benner, 1972/1994, p. 80). Albeit in close succession and interconnection, the critical observations and analyses are taking place before the technological or critical application of certain findings to fields of action. Rather than being an observation of what is, which is succeeded by the imposition of what should be, and in avoidance of affirming a certain explanation of reality or a certain aspect of culture, *inquiry as intervention* is to be understood as an (experimental) examination of *what might be possible*.

Such an inquiry is *both affirmative and non-affirmative*. It affirms the possibility of things being different and the effort of beating a path. What is affirmed is the joint and active construction of the possible. But it is also non-affirmative towards present structures of domination (or dominance in general) by way of things to be left behind—the path of disrupting reality and common sense, especially in its structures of hierarchy and dominance. At the same time, this inquiry is also *neither affirmative nor non-affirmative*. It does not affirm any positive way of being or any positive form of culture, what Benner calls bad positivity (Benner, 1982, p. 954). But neither is it non-affirmative in the sense of what might be called bad negativity, i.e., making a habit of finding fault with anything.

On the other hand, as is implied by the outline so far, this inquiry is also an *invention*. Experimental research (in education), as understood here, is not seeking evidence or discovering some truth already out there. Rather, it is an inquiry into (future) possibilities, possibilities that have to be given rise to by disordering the reality of common sense, i.e., by, first of all, envisioning research methods as systems of interference in order to stop “collud[ing] in the enactment of dominant realities” (Law & Urry, 2004, p. 399). As such, research has to be understood as action in the Arendtian sense.⁹ It “interrupt[s] what otherwise would have proceeded

⁹This is a conclusion that Arendt herself, of course, did not draw with regard to research. In general, however, such a view of research as the practice of intervention could be connected to, e.g. the account of Karin Knorr-Cetina in terms of the pragmatic turn in epistemology (Knorr-Cetina, 1981) or to Karen Barad’s attempt to overcome the dichotomy of theoretical and experimental physics (Barad, 2007).

automatically and therefore predictably” (Arendt, 1970, p. 31). Action not only begins something new, but also “[i]n order to make room for one’s action, [...] things as they were before are changed” (Arendt, 1971/1972, p. 5). In contrast to a scientific view of the future (in terms of *predictions*), experimental research as acting inquiry means practicing the habit of interrupting what is in order to make the future different (*enacting new beginnings*).

The scope of this context can be further explored when circling back to Rancière’s core idea of radical egalitarianism. In a recent interview, Rancière again contrasts practices of verifying inequality and practices of verifying equality (Rancière, 2017, p. 730). In accord with earlier reflections on his own method (Rancière, 2009), he does so in a way that explicitly characterizes his philosophical writing as an egalitarian democratic act through its practical impact: It “tries to work out the distinctiveness of egalitarian practices and *create a room* in which those practices can *become visible*” (Rancière, 2017, p. 735; transl. and emp. H.S./J.B.).

Through directing his philosophical writing towards helping democratic egalitarianism into its distinct form, Rancière’s egalitarianism takes off from the rejection of explanatory and representative stances, which demonstrate to those explained what they cannot do. In other words, explanations verify incapacities. Democratic or egalitarian action, in contrast, “is the form of action which carries out the disruption of any ultimate legitimacy of power, or, if you turn it on its positive side, the *affirmation* of the equal capacity of anybody” (Rancière, 2009, p. 120; emph. H.S./J.B.). The educational point of this concept, however, lies in its formal structure, which only becomes clear in its reversed version: In order to affirm the equal capacity of anybody (irrespective of what they actually do and can do), one actually needs to *affirm* the capacity of everyone to *do what they cannot do* (Pelletier, 2012, p. 112).

Against any comfort one could find in lacking courage to use one’s own thinking, in accord with Kant, this is about “forbidding the supposed ignorant one [...] the satisfaction of claiming that one is incapable of knowing more” (Rancière, 2010, p. 6). After all, suggesting that anyone is incapable of learning, thinking, and acting would amount to negating their freedom and emancipation. It is important that affirmations are not thought of as confirmations of existing images or endorsements of certain cultural qualities, they are not affirmations of an ideal either; they are “not the promise of an equality to come that will never come” (*ibid.*, p. 5). In contrast, they are affirmations that things could be different and that everybody is equal in bringing about new beginnings. And they practically work by forbidding their opposite: the comfort of well-diverseness and being in the know.

At first sight, this is rather an associative relevance of radical egalitarianism for educational research in the way in which it is expressed through its joint focus on emancipation and an extended understanding of the core figure of enlightenment. But, when Fink in his existential pedagogy speaks of “daring, projecting, and producing freedom” (1970, p. 221; transl. H.S./J.B.), it becomes visible that what is to be affirmed in emancipatory practices are intelligent capacities to dare thinking about future projections (Mollenhauer, 1983/2014, p. 117f.), which can take the form of practically insisting on the difference between reality and possibility—and thereby on the possibility of things being different (*ibid.*, p. 126f.).

This can be elaborated in view of the above-quoted passage, “practices becoming visible,” which has an acute relevance for educational research insofar as inquiry as intervention and invention appears as a redistribution of what can *become visible and sayable*. This importance of making things thinkable and sayable does not only go for educators or for growing up in general. Philosophical writing—and the same goes for educational research—is also working on such a (re)distribution of the sensible (Rancière, 2010, p. 8) or on the construction of what can be said about education at all (Mollenhauer, 1983/2014, p. 2). Rancière writes at the intersection of political and educational philosophy since he claims that “he does not say what politics is but what it might be” (Rancière, 2009, p. 119). After all, thinking and writing towards a construction of the possible might be characteristic of political and educational research in a way it is not for sociological, psychological, or other research. In a very concrete way, both political and educational researchers have traditionally seen it as their task to redistribute who counts as speakers (Spivak, 1988) or as just making noise (Rancière, 2009, p. 115). For education, just think about the invention of the notion of the child and its *Bildsamkeit* and self-activity. On the one hand, this means to ask, “Who is qualified for thinking at all?” (ibid., p. 116)? Who is qualified to speak? On the other hand, this also means to inquire about what is sayable and “thinkable at all” (ibid., p. 116). How does something that cannot be expressed become something for which we have adequate language (Mollenhauer, 1983/2014, p. 2f; 86f)?

Circling back once more to the above-quoted passage, what does it mean to “create a room,” a room, in which these redistributions of what is sayable and visible can take place? Benner praises Mollenhauer and especially his work on aesthetic education for “having won back spaces for *non-affirmative* education” (Benner, 2000b, p. 41; transl. and emph. H.S./J.B.), which can be said to be the (paradoxical) production of “a shift in the distribution of the sensible [as] an *affirmation and verification* of the fundamental equality those previously excluded already possessed” (Ruitenbergh, 2010, p. 622; emph. H.S./J.B.).

As we have seen, moreover, it remains an open issue how to translate this to renderings of educational research. The question would be how “reframing the distribution of the sensible” (Rancière, 2009, p. 122)—which for Rancière has mostly political connotations—might possibly be of special interest for educational research (if presented a little differently). It lies in taking the stance of *making room* in terms of things possibly being different. Whereas the educational tradition starting with Schleiermacher imagined this room first and foremost having to be made for unrepressed theorizing in the convivial seclusion of the Berlin salons (Schleiermacher, 1826/1964, p. 173; see also Mollenhauer, 1968/1970, pp. 119f and 132), for Rancière, however, this room is not created for the theory itself, but for practices of “*inventing* equality” (Rancière, 2017, p. 735; transl. and emp. H.S./J.B.). You can concede to Schleiermacher and the tradition of *Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* that educational theory does need this room it creates for itself (in order not to subject itself to any implicit or explicit repressions). Where they fall short, however, is in their claim of the dignity of practice, which prevents them from

exploring how educational theory itself is a disruptive intervention in the mode of equalization (other than applications of previously configured norms, of course).

Educational matters are not matters that we consider to be following some knowable rules or laws, and which therefore are thought of as being predictable. In education, we do refer to future matters, and our understanding works with anticipations, expectations, and possibilities. However this is by no means a futurity that is settled or fixed, but one that is—as Eugen Fink puts it in his emphasis on the productive and communal structure of research—a futurity which we *make* possible and which is possible through our action (Fink, 1970, p. 189). So, educational matters are not matters of prediction but matters of (joint or communal) deliberation in which both meaning and new possibilities of action are practically created (ibid., pp. 212–3). Meaning and freedom is not something we do come upon but something which we *come up with* cooperatively. And in educational terms, we do so in a deliberation among educators and children who might be different in how exactly their freedom is developed, but who are equal in *that* they are free (ibid., p. 214).

In terms of educational research, thus, in view of such a project of freedom—as it takes shape in jointly deliberating, forethinking, and concerting possibilities of action—we are trying to (conceptually) get hold of something which is rather constituted “through free projecting (*Entwurf*) and trial, through experiment and social experience” (Benner, 2000a, p. 34). In this sense, practical research—or when Benner speaks about practical theory or practical experiments (Benner, 1972/1994, p. 83)—is not to be confused with educational instrumentalism or normative pedagogy. Whereas in the “infamous” and piercing analysis of Luhmann and Schorr, pedagogy as academic endeavor gains its autonomy through the distinction of reality and norms (Luhmann & Schorr, 1979/1988, p. 161), what this comes down to is that *experimental educational inquiry*, as constructed here, rather manifests itself by *distinguishing reality and possibility*. It is neither about getting involved with educational reality as it *is* nor about what it *should* be. Rather, it is about inscribing itself into what educational practices *could* be.

Projecting a Space of Possibilities in Educational Research

To understand educational research in a framework of verification of equality, we would have to articulate equality explicitly in terms of research (as opposed to education). Thus, we have to ask what it looks like to disrupt *current research realities in the name of equality*. Traditional research—or, as Rancière polemicizes, the old method (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 15)—understands itself as a largely discrete practice of experts. This educational research practice is distinguished because it produces a certain knowledge about education that is thought of as impossibly being produced by the educational practice itself. In other words, educational practice is denied the capacity to produce the relevant knowledge it needs to sustain itself as a reflective practice. It gets into a position of permanent and one-sided dependency. Verifying equality in educational research means disrupting this very dependency.

Like the ignorant schoolmaster (Rancière, 2010, p. 6), the *emancipatory researcher* (constructively) disrupts the imputation of any incapacity to learn and to know by breaking the relation of dominance that has been established between research and practice by arrogating the monopoly of explanation and knowledge (or rationality, generally speaking). However, the Rancièrian picture needs to be qualified. The “old” research of explanation is only exerting its stultifying influence on practice, if it comports itself as being without alternative or if it is the dominant understanding of research. Any research in the style of a factual report and explanatory clarifications needs to be embedded into a practical nexus of emancipatory interest—as imagined by both Mollenhauer (1968/1970, p. 10; 51) and Benner (1972/1994, p. 110). That means it certainly has its place in the larger project of emancipation—and enlightenment, for that matter.

This larger emancipatory framework of educational research takes the form of a curious entanglement concerning the verification of the educational practitioner’s capacity to learn. On the one hand, the emancipatory researcher *forbids the educator the comfort of thinking they could not engage in inquiry themselves*, disrupting the inequality of not counting as a producer of relevant and legitimate knowledge. On the other hand, this means summoning the educator to do research in terms of inquiry and produce the relevant knowledge themselves—affirming the capacity to inquire. It is precisely under the current circumstances, in which a differentiated realm of “science and research” is generally thought to be responsible for matters of knowledge, that such emancipatory research is needed, as equality, generally, “needs to be acted out, to be verified time and again” (Sonderegger, 2014, p. 56). That is, as long as we live in a society with a hierarchy of knowledge at play, there is a need for emancipatory research that is deliberately disruptive to this order. Not in order to enlarge the gulf between research and practice or to extend the “old” dichotomies, not to follow other everyday authorities or to give in to other hierarchies, but to set out to *explore and inquire for oneself*.

Just as human becoming is imagined by Fink as projecting (*Entwurf*) (Fink, 1970, p. 221), from Benner’s conception of the pedagogical experiment we can argue that (educational) research, too, has to be understood from its projecting dimension. At first sight, this does not appear to be astonishing. Rather, it seems quite characteristic for modern humans to project themselves into either the ideal (Fink, 1970, p. 157) or the open future (Mollenhauer, 1983/2014, pp. 74–5)—in anticipation of what is possible (Fink, 1970, p. 126) or under the assumption that things could be different (Mollenhauer, 1983/2014, pp. 126–5). However, this is more than just emphasizing that practical experiments do come full circle as they reflect on their origins in the “contradictions of idea and reality” (Benner, 1972/1994, p. 113; transl. H.S./J.B.). What we mean by projecting has to explicitly go beyond suggestions to conceptualize pedagogy as practical science harmonizing between idea and reality—precisely if the understanding of research as a change agent gets to a point where reality is made fit to a thought-up ideal. In the end, this amounts to promising an ideal-to-come never come. In contrast, any such research that is not just producing knowledge about what is but that is also changing eventually has to deal with the indeterminacy of its own role with regard to how things could be

different from today. And this “different” is not a definite “different,” one that can be known or idealized; it is not a new reality to be generated.

At this point, it becomes clear once more that educational research is not fully taken up in speaking matter-of-factly. Especially as research that is “committed to the pragmatic theory” (Mollenhauer, 1968/1970, p. 132), it is bound to engage with what Mollenhauer, in the lingo of his time, called “the real-possible” (ibid.). Recalling Latour’s unique anti-factual realism, in which “[r]eality is not defined by matters of fact” (Latour, 2004, p. 232), but rather concerted by gatherings made possible, this goes far beyond any merely normative involvement as taking shape in holding on to some counter-factual expectations. Involvement in terms of matters of concern, on the one hand, comes down to questions of who is included to gather, who is having a part—or is being *beteiligt*. On the other hand, though, it is important to put a stronger emphasis on the circumstance that matters of concern are explicitly not “stable objects” which in the typical epistemic order of subject and object are assumed not to change during the process of research (Luhmann, 1997, p. 867). Rather, it seems we have to at least extend Latour’s anti-factual realism with a *possibilist stance* in order to properly take into consideration the distinct educational outlook on the open future as a space of possibilities. In this sense, verification as a principle of educational research is, in a very basic sense, an explicitly *unrealistic stance*, i.e., it is about continuously working on the distinction between what is and what could be possible (instead of: idea and reality).

Both Mollenhauer’s reference to the possible and Latour’s re-definition of reality in terms of gatherings and matters of concern, seem to account for this issue. Refining through these lenses our understanding of pedagogical experiments, we should point out, once again, the difference it makes whether educational research is about some educational reality out there, whether it is to produce a desired educational reality that is sketched in advance, or whether it takes place as a practical experiment in a community. A central clue to the latter conception lies in the fact that the practice of verification (in terms of concerting what could be) is a social scene.

Far from being secluded research on education and its influence on educational practice, educational research in this practical conception is projective cooperation (Fink, 1970, p. 239). Taking a leaf from Arendt’s conception of power, it is not so much the single (research-backed) act of exerting influence on practice, which is in focus when thinking about the practical involvement of research. Rather, it is the power that is of interest, which “springs up whenever people get together and *act in concert*” (Arendt, 1970, p. 52; emp. H.S./J.B.) and—to put it maybe a little too poetically—“where word and deed have not parted company” (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 200).

In what we have discussed before, we have seen that educational research, too, is acting in concert. It is precisely this acting in relation to others and their actions that goes against any technological understanding of the involvement of research with practice and against thinking about education and research from its endpoint. Further, it is not individuals that are empowered or become empowered. Rather, if we keep in mind that empowerment emerges when people get together in the name

of equality and act in concert, it is about the empowerment of the experimenting community. After all, a “solitary insight is not science, which it becomes only by being discussed” (Mollenhauer, 1968/1970, p. 45, transl. H.S./J.B.).

This perspective changes the entire outlook on what it means to be affirmative or non-affirmative. The candidate for affirmation is no longer a certain tradition or ideal, but taking an affirmative stance is to be understood as a communal or communicative act. In terms of criticality, taking this stance acknowledges that critical research is not a disclosing imposition from the outside, but rather a critical engagement of interlocutors with each other—much like Kemmis’ research in the first-person plural is emphasizing that different practitioners are equally joint as interlocutors (Kemmis, 2012, p. 896). After all, every researcher belongs to an encompassing experimenting community prefigured by what can be called “practice architectures” (Kemmis, 2012, p. 886), which by anchoring meaning and comprehensibility surely make any practical conduct possible, but which also are shaped and shifted by the actual practices. So, every inquiry is not only concerting, but also *necessarily* “an altering intervention in this communication community” (Mollenhauer, 1968/1970, p. 15; transl. H.S./J.B.). Thus, educational research has to account for the conjuncture that its field of study as well as its own practice are largely constituted by an experimental community.

As a consequence, we are able to imagine an understanding of educational research that is, in a way, complementary to Dewey’s well-known dictum that education is “an activity which *includes* science within itself” (Dewey, 1929/2008, p. 40). Educational research is an activity that includes education within itself. Becoming mindful of this recursive structure, i.e., of not only being research *on* education but being education itself, educational research should become able to account both for an educational understanding in terms of explanation, as well as (if not more so), in terms of its emancipatory dimension.

In a certain tradition, which is possibly prevalent in research settings inspired by natural science techniques, science is generally assumed to be educational in a rather reduced and restricted way. It is reduced insofar as it holds the explanatory function and the cognitive aspects of people’s engagement with science and research to be the whole spectrum of educative research activities. And it is restricted (and even stultifying) insofar as explanations turn out to be the unidirectional process of imparting knowledge, which, once it is scientifically gained and proven, is displayed with authority. There is, however, a need to broaden this view. Since dealing with experiences and actions whose outcome cannot possibly be foretold or predicted, practical research in education is neither just a representation of matters of fact nor a technological precept for a reality to be produced but a conjoint practical experiment in which new educational realities are projected and tested.

Above, we linked the emancipatory dimension of educational research to its creative or poetic dimension, which we expressed in terms of new possibilities. Thus, “creation” is not to be misunderstood, neither in terms of a technological regulation of practice nor in terms of a diligent fabrication of knowledge. Judged from Benner’s perspective, this research can be regarded as “non-affirmative” since it is neither instrumental in terms of bringing about a pre-known future nor is it simply leaving

everything as it is. At the same time, this research is “affirmative” in a way Benner himself was reluctant to concede: it becomes part of pedagogical experimentalism in which pedagogical principles are verified and thus “affirmed.” The image of educational research experiments in a creative and concerted community of equals is about making room for emancipatory research, which is not antagonistic or even hostile towards explanation and factual knowledge (as it, at times, seems to be the case for Rancière’s emancipatory thinking). However, the acquisition of knowledge or the explanation of reality, though they have their place, can never be a sufficient goal of educational research, whose vanishing point is the emancipation of educational researchers and practitioners alike.

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Chapter 11

Non-affirmative Theory of Education and Cultural-Historical Activity Theory: Where Do They Meet?



Alex Mäkiharju, Petra Autio, and Michael Uljens 

Abstract This study investigates how cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) and non-affirmative theory of education (NAT) position themselves regarding the questions of normativity, ontology, and epistemology. The reason for choosing these three issues as a point of departure for a comparative study is that they highlight three interrelated dimensions of how educational research and theory are related to educational practice. The amalgamation of the theories is presented in a dialectical and comparative dialogue. Both theories highlight the cultural-historical context and emphasise the achievement of autonomy and emancipation through an individual's self-activity. While NAT is primarily perceived as a theory conceptualising education as a cultural and historical phenomenon, CHAT is designed as a general systems-theoretical approach to be used as a point of departure to achieve a change in praxis, but not by directing praxis from an outside interest.

Keywords Non-affirmative theory of education · Cultural-historical activity theory · Normativity · Epistemology · Ontology

Introduction—Three Dilemmas for Educational Theory

A core challenge in developing educational theory and related research is the so-called theory-praxis problem (Schmied-Kowarzik, 2008). How does education theory relate to educational or pedagogical practice? In the following analysis, we aim at highlighting some aspects of how two significant approaches to education deal with this core issue. The approaches are CHAT, as represented by Engeström (1987), and NAT, as represented by Benner (1987, 2015, Chap. 2, this volume). In our comparative analysis, we discern between three aspects of the theory-praxis problem. They are the ontological, epistemological, and normative-ethical aspects.

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As we see it, the main issue in the *ontological* dilemma has to do with the character or nature of education and learning. In short, what is education, what is learning, and how do they relate to each other? In philosophy, answers to the ontological problem are sometimes offered in terms of general assumptions about the nature of external social reality (Bhaskar, 1975; Winch, 1958, 1969), for example, by defending different versions of realism. Such discussions deal with how we think theory relates to reality. For example, do we argue for a representational approach, saying that educational theory *reflects* educational reality as it is in and of itself? Alternatively, some argue that educational theory essentially has a *constitutive* function (i.e., that this theory makes visible what is counted as education in the first place). To this extent, such constitutive ontological positions limit themselves to only saying something about education and learning and how they are related; they may be called *regional ontological positions*. These regional answers are crucial in making explicit the character or nature of the phenomenon in question.

The *epistemological* aspect of the theory-praxis problem has to do with what kind of information we believe we have access to regarding this reality and what kind of knowledge we may arrive at about education through educational research. Traditionally, in epistemology, a distinction has been made between critical, hermeneutical, and positivistic approaches, while intervention-oriented research is sometimes seen as a subcategory of some of these. This epistemological question points towards the methods used in empirical education research.

In the normative-*ethical* aspect of the theory-praxis problem, we refer to the aims and methods of education. More precisely, the question is whether and to what extent educational *theories* themselves should include formulations regarding the aims and prescriptions of methods to be used in education. We may also ask if theories of education can avoid taking a position regarding the aims.

Reformulating the aims into research questions, this study primarily intends to answer the following questions:

1. What are the conceptual similarities and differences between NAT and CHAT as they ontologically characterise the phenomenon of education?
2. How do NAT and CHAT position themselves in relation to established epistemological traditions?
3. How do NAT and CHAT respond to the ethical question of normativity?

The expectation is that our comparative research strategy regarding the above three core dilemmas may provide us with a more reflected understanding of each approach. Due to its central character, the main emphasis is put on the ontological aspect.

The article is structured into four parts. First, we describe where the theories are historically rooted. In the second and third parts, we discuss how NAT and CHAT position themselves in relation to the three core dilemmas. In the fourth part, we compare the theories based on which conclusions are made regarding how the approaches may meet each other in a dialogue. Before doing so, it is worth mentioning that both theories are constantly evolving. It is, therefore, impossible to bring forth every aspect and nuance of each theory. The theoretical discussion, is therefore, mainly based on Engeström's (1987) work on CHAT and Benner's (1987) work on NAT.

NAT and CHAT—Shared Roots with Divergent Branches

Both NAT and CHAT draw on partly overlapping roots of educational reflection (Kant, Fichte, and Hegel). The seminal ideas very much draw on modern philosophy of the subject or the mind. The educational dilemma presents itself anew by accepting a philosophy of freedom and leaving ideas about human beings as determined by, for example, innate eternal sin, social class, or utopian, teleological visions about the future. The educational core dilemma that presented itself was that if we assumed that the subject was radically free, this would lead us to two possible but contradictory conclusions. First, if an individual is radically free, this may lead to a view where education is seen as having the complete power to mould the individual along predetermined intentions. This would view education as omnipotent. The second but opposite conclusion from viewing the individual as free is how educational influence is even possible. If radically free, would it not mean that the learner herself would be in total control regarding the construction of knowledge and cultural identity? The subject would determine for herself what effects pedagogical influences would exert. Such a constructivist position would make education obsolete. Both CHAT and Bildung-centred NAT draw on and develop positions that allow us to explore this pedagogical causality.

CHAT has grown and developed within the Russian educational and psychological tradition. The philosophical basis can be found in Marx's (1845) work "Theses on Feuerbach", which accentuates that research is not to be limited to a description of the world but to contribute to its change and development (Engeström et al., 1999). As an early representative, Lev Vygotsky was inspired by Marx. Vygotsky's work was, in turn, developed by Aleksei Nikolajevits Leont'ev.¹ The Finnish educationalist Yrjö Engeström developed the theory further by introducing a third generation of activity systems (Engeström, 1987). It is this version of activity theory that will be the subject of our analysis of CHAT. The theory has been defined as a 'cross-disciplinary framework for studying how humans purposefully transform natural and social reality, including themselves, as an ongoing culturally and historically, materially and socially mediated process' (Roth et al., 2012, p. 1).

As there are many parallel approaches within the sociocultural and socio-historical branch of research on learning and education, we wish to specify the reason for choosing CHAT as a comparative counterpart to NAT instead of, for example, sociocultural theory (Säljö, 2011) or situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). One reason for deciding on CHAT is that it represents a theoretically well-refined, fruitful, and widely accepted theory within learning research (Engeström, 1999). In addition to being an influential and well-elaborated theory, its universalistic character makes it interesting for further analysis. The theory is applied within several fields of research (e.g., education, economics, health care, technology, and law) (Engeström & Glăveanu, 2012; Engeström & Sannino, 2010; Yasukawa et al., 2013). CHAT applies the same terminology and language regardless of which area

¹For further reading, see Vygotsky (1978) and Leont'ev (1981).

is analysed, making it interesting to focus on a specific area, in this case, education (Hardman, 2008; Knutagård, 2003).

Non-affirmative education theory is a concept and collective notion referring to a longstanding tradition of theorising about education in German and Nordic education research (Benner, 1987; Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017; von Oettingen, 2001). Although elements of non-affirmative education may already be found in the writings of, for example, Plato (Benner, in press), in its modern sense, NAT draws on the modern German-Nordic (West European) education tradition, with Rousseau, Fichte, Schleiermacher, and Herbart as representatives. NAT focuses on questions of how intentional pedagogical interventions, as carried out in schools and educational institutions, connect with the learner's activity to reach beyond existing ways of relating to the world, others, and oneself (Benner, 2015; Uljens, 2018; Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017). Both the theory and the terminology are relatively unknown outside of Germany, and the Nordic countries, which is paradoxical as NATs' way of thinking is essentially aligned with a Western-European education tradition.

NAT of Education

Given the three perspectives on the theory-praxis problem, non-affirmative education theory represents a regional ontological position, starting with asking what education, in essence, is and how it relates to the process of *Bildung*. In drawing on the theory of *Bildung*, non-affirmative education aims to develop a position between, or rather beyond, the so-called freedom philosophy and liberalism. Non-affirmative education theory avoids describing education as something omnipotent or obsolete but instead follows a third line of reasoning. An alternative view on *pedagogical causality*, as introduced and developed by Fichte and Herbart, provides ideas for bridging this dilemma with the concepts *summon to self-activity* and *bildsamkeit*. In discussing these and other notions, we refer to Table 11.1, as developed by Benner (Chap. 2, this volume).

Four core concepts are of particular significance in NAT. The first two are constitutive: (a) summoning to self-activity and (b) *bildsamkeit*. These concepts are fundamental in the sense that they illuminate how the theory ontologically describes teaching as related to the individual's effort to reach beyond a current state of affairs through his or her own learning activity. While these constitutive principles consider universal features of pedagogical *Bildung*-related activity, additional concepts are necessary when locating this process into, for example, institutionalised education governed by a curriculum. For this, two additional notions are introduced: the regulative (societal) principles that describe (a) a non-hierarchical relation between different societal praxis forms and (b) how societal interest transforms itself into educational practice (Benner, 2015).

Table 11.1 Two constitutive and two regulative principles describe education as related to the processes of *Bildung*

	Constitutive basic concepts of the individual dimension	Regulative basic concepts of the social dimension
A <i>Theories of education (Erziehung)</i>	(2) Summoning to self-activity (<i>Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit</i>)	(3) Pedagogical transformation of societal influences and requirements
B <i>Theories of Bildung</i>	(1) <i>Bildsamkeit</i> as humans being destined to receptive and spontaneous corporeity, freedom, historicity and linguisticity	(4) Non-hierarchical order of cultural and societal practices
	C <i>Theories of educational institutions and institutional reform</i>	

Benner (Chap. 2, this volume)

Constitutive Principles of Non-affirmative Theory

Bildsamkeit

The notion of *bildsamkeit* takes on different meanings in German education theory, as its counterpart in Swedish does (i.e., *Bildbarhet*). First, in both languages, these concepts generally include the human ability to learn, referring to a kind of plasticity or the individual being indeterminate. Second, the concept typically refers to the possibility of influencing the other by educational means but only by inviting the other to actively work with a given set of contents or tasks. In other words, the notion of everyday use refers to the subject's ability to be educated. While the first meaning refers to an innate human ability (learning), the second meaning refers to the possibility of externally affecting the individual (educability). In neither of these definitions is the subject's own activity or contribution visible. A third interpretation advocated by NAT is the following (Uljen & Ylimaki, 2017).

In the *Bildung*-centred tradition, as explicated by Humboldt, *Bildsamkeit* refers to the free *interplay* between the individual and the world, with varying intensity but in principle as a never-ending process. In this interpretation, the ability to learn is assumed, but in the process of *Bildung*, as open-ended interplay, an individual is seen as actively reaching out to the world in the very same moment that she is influenced by the world. To be human involves a continuous process of becoming in relation to one's being. This capacity to learn also means the creative ability to think about what is not present, to think beyond, or to imagine. This feature of being human—an experimental reflection on one's world-related activities—is not a gift from the pedagogue but rather something that may be influenced but not determined. More precisely expressed, *Bildsamkeit* refers to the individual's engagement in a reflective, meaning-making activity that is initiated by an educative act. Here, we see *Bildung* as the ever-ongoing interplay between man and the world, while *Bildsamkeit* is a subcategory of *Bildung* referring to a learner's activity related to pedagogical initiatives (Uljen & Ylimaki, 2017).

Summoning to Self-Activity

The Other is actively forming new knowledge, but it is done intersubjectively, not only through a subjective process. Education as a summons to self-activity is related to the principle of *Bildsamkeit*. First, education as a summoning to self-activity includes recognising the subject as capable of transcending its present state. This transcending is assumed to occur through the learner's own activity. Education as a summoning to self-activity means to de-center the teaching-studying-learning process by involving the learner as a constitutive, active part in the process. Given the individual's assumed freedom, the process is ultimately dependent on how educational invitations are received by the learner.

In non-affirmative education, the pedagogical activity involves, in essence, intervening in the process of *Bildung* and initiating the learner's *Bildsamkeit* as the learner's active interplay with the world. How the world comes to be presented to the subject is then central, as is the way the individual is invited to act on such presentations. Pedagogical activity simultaneously co-creates experimental spaces that allow the subject to distance herself from her immediate life world and make her experiences of the world and role in its objects of epistemic and moral reflection. While the process of *Bildung* is lifelong, pedagogical activity has a clear beginning and an end.

This pedagogical invitation as a summons to self-activity operates as a kind of intervention in the subject's relationship with themselves, the world, and others. The learner and the teacher establish a shared and mutual sphere where the learner can come to perceive the world differently. In a pedagogical setting, human *Bildsamkeit* is something recognised by the subject and seen as having the potentiality for self-transcendence. Therefore, *Bildsamkeit* refers to the subject's processing of her experiences through her own activity. The result of the interaction in the pedagogical space is undetermined and therefore impossible to predict for the teacher and the learner. Studying becomes an intentional activity in which the learner is trying to transcend his or her present state. Learning is typically what is experienced after intentional study activity has occurred (Uljens, 2018).

This line of thought assumes education is about challenging the individual to transcend her present life world, her way of understanding herself, the world, or others; the educator cannot limit her activity to only confirming or affirming the learners' present experiences or interests. On the contrary, although education needs to recognise the learner's present potential, intentions, experiences, interests, and identity, the very idea of education is to challenge the learner. In this respect, education is about recognising the learner, but it is not about affirming the learner. Rather, education as a non-affirmative activity introduces elements, situations, occasions, observations, and contents that may contradict the learner's present way of understanding the world. Education in this sense is something that is irritating, frustrating, or that stands in contrast with the learner's life-world experiences. That this summoning of the learner's self-activity is non-affirmative means intentionally involving the learner in the process, and that external aims and interests are not

mediated uncritically. Such unproblematising, affirmative instruction runs the risk of making education into an instrumental technique whose value could be measured in terms of how well the learner has adopted pre-existing ways of thinking (Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017).

Regulative Principles of Non-affirmative Educational Theory

Non-hierarchical Relations

That politics regulate education and that education prepares for political participation is common sense. Yet, it is worth observing that if we accept both of these positions as simultaneously valid, it also means that we define the relationships among, for example, politics, economy, and education as non-hierarchical or non-linear. Such a position is subject to continuous critique between and within these fields of practice. As a consequence, such a position also reminds us that education must accept that it is subordinate to politics, but not in a way that lets politics escape educational critique. Further, it means that education must be organised in such a way that it allows future political actants to redefine politics. It also means that education cannot reserve an omnipotent position for itself by claiming the right to formulate what future education should contribute. In educational theory, there are many proposals that societal practices deserve to be identified as fundamental and included in a system or praxeology. The number of these societal practices is less important; their non-linearity is what is decisive. Benner (1987), for his part, identifies six so-called praxeological co-existential (i.e., ethics, politics, economics, health, law, and education). These co-existential all have their own terminology to describe the *regional ontology* of each societal praxis form.

How Societal Interests Are Transformed into Legitimate Pedagogical Practice

The above idea about non-hierarchical relations between education and politics, given the constitutive principles of summoning self-activity and *bildsamkeit*, will have certain implications for how the second regulative principle is defined. How do societal interests transform into educational practices? The answer provided by non-affirmative theory is normative. It says pedagogical practice should organise itself in relation to the curricular aims and contents in such a way that the principle of *Bildsamkeit* is not violated. We may then explain the difference between affirmative and non-affirmative education as follows.

Schools are led by prescribed goals. To the extent that education expects teachers to lead individuals to a predefined way of viewing the world without involving the

learner in self-directed activity, pedagogical activity operates affirmatively. However, as the pedagogical invitation, in terms of a summons for self-activity, is a provocation to the subject to transcend his or her current state by his or her own activity, a teacher should not uncritically affirm current or future ideals and values. Summoning self-activity rather opens up a reflective, experimental space of *Bildung* by inviting the learner herself to make meaning from certain presented content. Such a pedagogy is necessary in order to become a cultural reasoning, self-reflective subject.

Differently expressed, school education may be culturally conservative, oriented to reproducing the culture as it is, or its education may be culturally radical or utopian, oriented not to reproduce but to produce a world beyond what is at hand. Both models may expect teachers, in their pedagogical activity, to affirm such conservative or utopian ambitions. Yet, if these aims were affirmed, the principle of *Bildsamkeit* would not be recognised as valid.

In any political system, curriculum policies formulate what is expected to be passed on in terms of culture to the next generation and what is to be reached with the help of education. The question is *how* this is done. Non-affirmative pedagogy expects teachers to act in a problematising fashion in relation to such external aims, regardless of whether they are conservative or utopian. Transforming societal aims into pedagogical practice in a *Bildung*-centred tradition that accepts the principle of *Bildsamkeit* as crucial is about securing the learner's space to work on the selected content and make up her own mind.

CHAT

The approach of CHAT is activist and interventionist and has been developed as a theoretical framework for merging practical transformation and extensive research (Sannino, 2011; Sannino et al., 2016). Ontologically, the point of departure in CHAT is a *tension* between society (the collective) and the individual. Society and the individual are seen as reciprocally constituting each other: the individual exists within society, and society exists within the individual. An individual's action can never be understood as isolated from the reality that the individual exists within (Knutagård, 2003). Simultaneously, society is seen as a qualitative whole, larger than the sum of individual activities. From an ontological perspective, this position represents a general approach to social and cultural philosophy. The reciprocal relationship is a point of departure that guides understanding in any form of societal practice, education being one of them. CHAT deals with this constitutive tension by arguing for a kind of contextual learning theory with a societal perspective that stems from a Hegelian worldview. The theory is intended to be valid for understanding, interpreting, guiding, and examining learning-related change processes within any societal field of practice (e.g., education, health care, law, IT).

Epistemologically, the activity system can be defined as a system theory. The goal of a system theory is to create models of the dynamics, conditions, and

constraints to clarify objects, methods, and tools that can be applied to other systems at every level of organisational settings. This means that a goal can be reached in many ways (Stichweh, 2010).

Historically, the approach has evolved through different phases. Vygotsky (1978) initiated the first generation of CHAT. He proposed the notion of *mediation*, which was crystallised through a triad consisting of a subject, object, and mediating artefact. CHAT emphasises that individuals do not simply react to their surroundings and environment biologically. Rather, these responses are mediated through cultural artefacts, tools, and symbols (Engeström, 1987).² However, the first generation of activity theory was criticised as being limited since the unit of analysis was too focused on the single individual (Engeström, 2001).

Leont'ev (1981)³ overcame this limitation in the second generation of activity theory. He clarified the important difference between individual *action* and collective *activity*. Through his famous example of the *primeval collective hunt*, he demonstrated that everyone performs individual actions in order to achieve a collective goal (outcome) (Leontev, 1981). When activity theory gained prominence in Europe during the 1970s, critical questions regarding diversity and dialogue between different traditions, cultures, and perspectives were raised (Engeström, 2001).

In the third generation of activity models, the perspective was again extended. The third generation of the theory addresses not only individual actions and collective activities but also learning between and within organisations or *activity systems*. In the third generation of activity, the analysis includes at least two interacting activity systems. The components within a third-generation activity system were defined by Engeström (1987) and are based on the different components' roles in the learning process within an activity system. The components are defined in Fig. 11.1.

Subjects refer to the acting individual or individuals within an activity system. *Mediating artefacts* refer to the meanings embodied in objects as these objects come into play in the social world. Such mediating artefacts are essential to

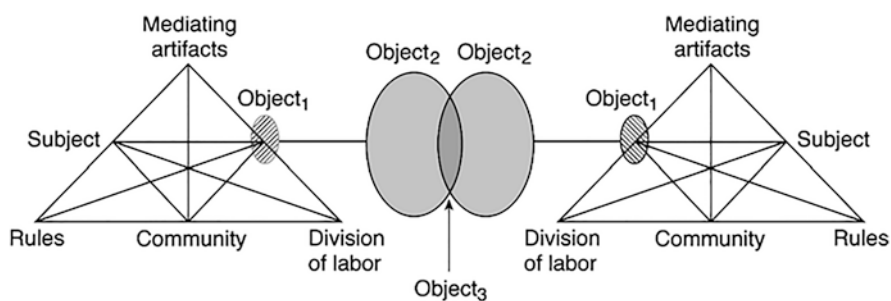


Fig. 11.1 Two interacting activity systems as a minimal model for the third generation of activity theory. (Engeström, 2001)

²For further reading, see Vygotsky (1978).

³For further reading, see Leontev (1981).

culturally mediated, historically developing practical activities (Daniels, 2004). Mediating artefacts are tool-like resources gathered by the subject. These tools mediate thought between the subject and the context within an activity. The subject uses a tool (or tools) to accomplish the object and achieve the intended outcome. These tools can be psychological or material. The tools or artefacts can be linguistic or non-linguistic (Barab et al., 2002).

The *object* of an activity system represents the problem space that the subject is working towards. The activity is directed, moulded, and transformed into outcomes with the help of symbolic, internal, and external mediating artefacts, including both tools and signs.

Social norms (conventions, interactions) and *professional rules* (such as laws, and decrees) within the activity system that affect the subject's actions are referred to as *rules*.

The people who participate, share the same problem space, and are involved in the object-oriented nature of the subject's activity system are referred to as the *community*. The community is the larger group of subjects that exist within the system and is described as exerting a powerful influence on the other elements of the activity system.

The *division of labour* is both vertical and horizontal and refers to the negotiation of responsibilities, tasks and power relations within activity systems.

Vygotsky, Leontev, and Engeström all contributed to the contemporary mainstream understanding of CHAT as it developed from a theory that focused on a single individual's activity and a limited number of artefacts to one that takes into account multiple activity systems and several artefacts. Through this work, they also developed and made clear the epistemological and ontological foundations of the theory as we understand it today.

Expansive Learning

From a pedagogical perspective, the notion of *learning* is at the centre of the whole approach. CHAT describes learning as something expansive. In explaining expansive learning, Engeström (2001) makes use of *four central questions*. In addition to these four questions, five main principles form a matrix that can be used as an analytical tool for empirical research (Engeström, 2001; Fitzsimons, 2003).

The first question that CHAT points out concerns *who* the learning subjects are and how they are defined and located. The question of who is defined and located as the subjects encompassed in an activity system. The second question seeks an answer to *why* they learn and what makes them make the effort to learn. The third question relates to *what* they learn and what the contents and outcomes of their learning are. The fourth and last question is: *How* do they learn? and What are the key processes of learning? These questions form the foundation for how learning is regarded by individuals and organisations. In addition to these four questions, Engeström summarises CHAT by using five principles, explained below.

From a pedagogical perspective, we immediately see that these questions cover what is normally referred to by the traditional didactic triangle. However, what makes this triangle *cultural* and *historical* is revealed in the five additional principles relevant to understanding learning. Second, this triangle (what, how, and why) is disconnected from the school as a context for learning.

The first principle is that a collective, artefact-mediated, and object-centred *activity system*, understood in its network relations to other activity systems, is taken as the prime unit for analysis. Goal-directed individual and group actions are only understandable when interpreted against the backdrop of an activity system. Activity systems realise and reproduce themselves by generating actions and operations.

Second, as an activity system always involves a community of multiple points of view, traditions, and interests, *multi-voicedness* is central. Division of labour creates different positions for the partakers, who carry their own histories. The activity system itself also carries multiple layers and elements of history engraved in artefacts, rules, and conventions. Multi-voicedness is multiplied in networks of interacting activity systems and also shows the *multiperspectival* (Spinuzzi, 2015) nature of the activity, and providing an understanding of how actors with different perspectives, activities, and motives can work together and develop knowledge.

Third, given that activity systems are moulded over lengthy periods of time, their *historicity* is crucial to understand. The challenges and potential can only be understood against the activity system's history. History needs to be studied as both a local history of the activity system and its objects and as a history of the theory and tools used in shaping the activity.

The *fourth* principle consists of *contradictions* as sources of change and development. The concept of contradictions takes on a central role in this theory. They are primarily seen as essential features for *driving* change and development. Contradictions are not seen as problems or conflicts. Rather, contradictions are historically accumulated structural tensions within and between activity systems. Contradictions are not immediately visible, but they are disturbances that arise because of contradictions noted in the activities that ensue. Based on the assumption that contradictions accumulate over an extensive time span, contradictions demand analyses of historical courses of events. A hypothesis that has been generated through historical analysis can be tested and enriched with data concerning contradictions and conflicts that members of an organisation have said and experienced (Engeström, 2016).

Engeström (1987) explains the contradictions by using four levels of contradiction within the human activity system (see Fig. 11.2). These contradictions are required, but they do not constitute a sufficient reason for expansive learning (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). Level 1 consists of the primary inner contradiction within the central activity that exists between the components in the activity system. For example, a primary contradiction can be the division of labour between teachers in a school. The secondary contradiction is to be found between components in the central activity. The contradiction is often revealed between two or more components in the activity system. Secondary contradictions are often made visible when

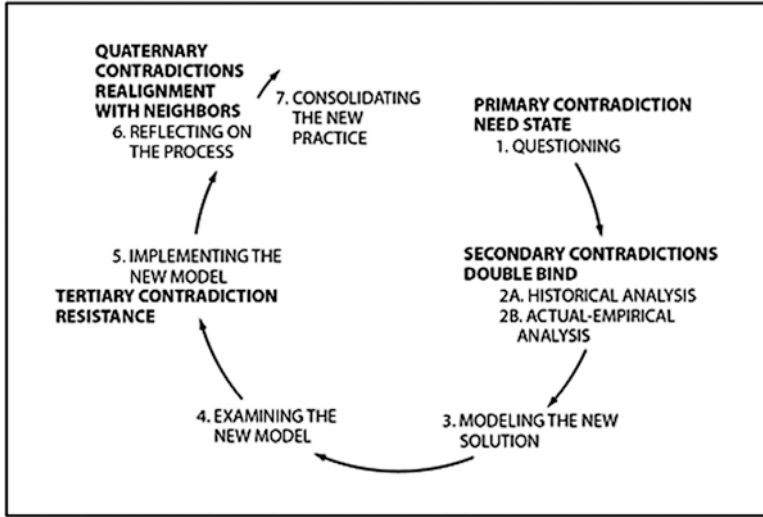


Fig. 11.2 The phases and corresponding contradictions of expansive learning. (Engeström, 1999, p. 384)

new elements (e.g., technology) appear in the system. A recent example could be the transition from traditional classroom teaching before the coronavirus pandemic to virtual teaching methods during the pandemic. The tertiary contradiction appears when individuals of the community ‘introduce the object and motive of a culturally more advanced form of the central activity into the dominant form of the central activity’ (Engeström, 1987, p. 103). For example, a teacher wants to teach individually (the dominant motive), while a school leader emphasises a collaborative teaching method (the culturally more advanced motive). The quaternary contradiction is between the central activity and essential *neighbouring activities*. A neighbouring activity refers to an activity that encompasses the object and the outcome of the central activity (object activity). These are the activities that create instruments for the central activity (instrument-producing activities), the activities that affect the subject in the central activity, such as education and skills (subject-producing activities), and activities related to laws, statutes, and administration that affect the rules of the central system (rule-producing activities).

The final and fifth principles are to define an activity system as the unit of analysis. The theory of expansive learning indicates that learning happens through an expansive cycle (see Fig. 11.2). Activity systems move through relatively long cycles of qualitative transformations. As contradictions within an activity system are intensify, some individual participants begin to question and deviate from its established norms. A full cycle of expansive learning may be understood as a collective journey through the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) of the activity.

Engeström (1987) defines the ZPD as the ‘distance between the everyday actions of individuals and the historically new form of the societal activity that can be collectively generated’ (p. 137). The distance between the present everyday actions of

the individuals and the historically new form of societal activity can be generated as a solution to the double bind⁴ potentially embedded in activities.

Engeström argues that theories of learning that limit their focus to an individual's ability to learn new knowledge and skills do not promptly explain how complex learning truly is. For example, these theories often presuppose that the knowledge or skill that is being taught and learned is stable and reasonably well-defined and is being taught by a competent teacher who knows what and how to *teach*. Learning in professional organisations may occur in stark contrast to the former presupposition. The reasons behind this are that organisations and people sometimes learn knowledge and skills that are not stable, defined, or even understood ahead of time. Subsequently, people must learn new activities due to important transformations in their personal lives and organisational practices. Skills and knowledge are being learned at the same time as they are being created (Engeström, 2001).

Expansive learning is a tool of intervention and a longitudinal process of collaborative knowledge construction. Learning is described as a cyclic model in which development occurs through different steps that epistemologically describe how CHAT views learning. A *problem* can be concrete or abstract and is in a state of change when being processed in the different phases of the expansive cycle in order to ultimately reach a concrete solution, which includes the conversion of the solution of the problem into practice. Expansive learning is spiral-shaped, and different phases emerge when new problems are identified or when a need for expansive learning arises (Engeström, 1999). When expansive learning occurs, the object of the activity system is renegotiated, which, in turn, leads to an expansion of the object.

The need state, included in the primary contradiction, is manifested by contradictions within components of the activity system. The need state, when a new artefact is introduced, functions as a starting point for the activity system. The double bind is a secondary contradiction between the components in the activity system when a foreign element is introduced to the activity system. The tertiary contradiction is between the old and the new activity; it is about application and generalisation. Finally, the quaternary contradiction is between the new activity and the neighbouring activities; it is about the reflection of the process and the consolidation of the new practice.

By combining the four educational questions with the five principles, Engeström's matrix is used to epistemologically examine and define expansive learning within organisations. All questions are answered concerning every element that is included in a matrix. Based on the focus of the study, relevant components and questions from the matrix are selected and answered.

Based on the matrix, it is possible to epistemologically analyse how learning occurs within and between activity systems, for example, when multiple activity systems interact to achieve a joint goal or learn something.

⁴A double bind is, according to Bateson et al. (1956), an inner contradiction in conjunction with a communicative situation where an individual involved in a relationship receives two negating messages causing the individual to be wrong regardless of response.

Formative Intervention

CHAT is an activist and interventionist approach (Sannino et al., 2016). Within CHAT, several intervention methods have been developed, such as organisation workshop (Carmen & Sobrado, 2000), the clinic of activity (Clot, 2009), and the change laboratory (Sannino, 2020; Virkkunen & Newnhan, 2013). These methods are all different approaches to *formative interventions* (Engeström, 2011). Here, we will take a closer look at Change Laboratories (CL).

The CL method was first implemented in Finland in 1995. The structure typically involves six to twelve weekly sessions that last approximately two hours each, with subsequent follow-up sessions. The design is based on historically formed contradictions. In the sessions, both participants and researchers use a set of representational devices designed for analysing contradictions in their activities in order to develop new solutions. This sounds similar to action research, but a distinctive difference is that the conceptual tools that stem from CHAT are used in the process. The approach is built on two main epistemological principles, namely *double stimulation* and *ascending from the abstract to the concrete* (Sannino et al., 2016).

Double stimulation is a principle of volition and agency. In short, the studies are not only of the task that the researcher or experimenter designed. The subject is also always interpreting and reconstructing the task, which cannot be strictly controlled from the outside. In his studies on the development of children, Vygotsky also gave the children potentially useful tools—mediating artefacts—which could radically change the experiment and reveal new psychological formations in the child (Sannino et al., 2016).

Ascending from the abstract to the concrete is a principle and method of dialectics developed by Davydov (Engeström, 2020). A prime example of an abstraction is the idea of the commodity as the *germ cell* of capitalism, as developed by Marx. The germ cell is the starting point from which one ascends to the conceptually mastered concrete. As a starting point, the germ cell is manipulated and transformed (or experimented with) to find a basic explanatory relationship, which is represented with the help of a model. This model of a germ cell is used to generate and solve further problems. This diversification and enrichment of an abstract model lead to an ascent to the concrete. Or, in other words, a conceptually mastered systemic concreteness that opens up possibilities for development and innovation (Engeström, 2020).

By ascending from the abstract to the concrete, a reconceptualisation of the object of an activity can be attained. This is not only a process of observation and categorisation, but also of practical experimentation that connects the origins of the germ cell to its reconceptualisation. This internally contradictory unity generates new complex, theoretically concrete developments (Engeström et al., 2012).

To summarise, formative interventions are expansive learning processes in which learners reconceptualise and practically transform the object of their activity to face its unsustainable historically formed contradictions. In CL, the support and

provocation by the researcher-interventionists lead to an expansion of the object by mobilising concepts stemming from CHAT (Sannino et al., 2016).

NAT and CHAT: A Comparative Analysis—Where Do They Meet?

In the following section, we intend to analyse and discuss similarities and differences between the two approaches concerning three aspects of the theory-practice problem: the ontological, the epistemological, and the normative problems.

The previous short descriptions reveal that CHAT and NAT have comparable features but also exhibit differences. Both theories originate from the similar roots of the modern, post-Kantian theory of education developed based on Fichte's critique of Kant's transcendental conception of subjectivity. Based on Fichtean and Hegelian ideas, both recognition and the empirical Other are of significant importance (Kivelä, 2004). Through the concept of summoning self-activity and the notion that this is constitutive of the individual's development into cultural being, the theories accentuate the importance of the cultural-historical setting within both approaches (Davydov, 1999; Miettinen, 2020).

Ontological Similarities and Differences

Through an analysis of ontological positioning, we refer to how each theory conceptualises its object. Our findings show how the theories regard pedagogical intervention. The subheadings reflect similarities and differences in how the theories handle the theory-praxis dilemma.

Learning and Teaching

Perhaps the most striking difference between the two approaches is how they frame the process of learning. While NAT focuses on learning as it relates to teaching as a relational phenomenon, CHAT focuses on how learning occurs in collaborative processes where the relations between the actors are more horizontal. In CHAT, learning occurs through interventions. It is the community that sets up action plans ahead of planned interventions, a model similar to lesson planning. The goal is to change a specific practice; the planning is affirmative, but the intervention process is non-affirmative.

When NAT is used to view human learning, it is in relation to somebody summoning somebody to self-activity. NAT suggests that human beings are endowed with the human capacity to learn (*Bildsamkeit*) and, like Humboldt and Rousseau,

observes that humans learn regardless of teaching through continuous and active interplay with the world (the process of *Bildung*). Yet, NAT does not limit its theorising to the learning process but engages in how pedagogical interventions operate and how we may conceptually explain the teaching-studying-learning process. In contrast, CHAT is an interdisciplinary theory. Despite the first impression, it is not only a theory of learning but also a theory of human activity. CHAT does not focus on individual learning but on collective transformations as expansive learning processes. The Hegelian concept of *need* lies has an ontological foundation. Thus, CHAT is a learning theory and does not represent itself as primarily an educational theory. However, given its Hegelian roots, it is not surprising that CHAT finds the empirical Other as having a constitutive function in human learning, whereby this approach, like NAT, deviates clearly from intra-individualist constructivist theories. The concept of ZPD and expansive learning, as well as the idea of teaching as summoning self-activity, clearly indicate that learning typically occurs in relation to others and that it can be guided by a more competent other (Engeström, 1987).

The Learners' Activity in the Centre

Both approaches emphasise that learning is a task for the learners. The individual gains knowledge only to the extent he or she can encounter and, at some initial level, comprehend the content in such a meaningful way that helps her to reach beyond a present or previous understanding. Benner (1987) expresses this by claiming that in teaching, teachers are paradoxically forced to treat the learner as if they would *already* be able to master what the learner *may become* able to master through the learning process. In CHAT, Engeström (2001) includes what we call *learning an invention*, or that knowledge and skills are being learned as they are being created. Such an extension of the object of learning theory is welcome, although teaching in schools can, to a limited extent, mimic such a view on learning. However, the concept of summoning the learner's self-activity may, from the learners' perspective, appear very close to learning as expansion.

The Object or Contents of the Learning Process

Both approaches accentuate the centrality of the learning contents. Learning is always about learning something. CHAT expresses this by being oriented towards the core issues or principled insights present in the learning content. NAT again, in its interpretation of *Bildung*, similarly reminds us that pedagogically driven learning focuses on the content, yet reminds us that brute learning of the contents as such is not what is sought. Rather, in NAT, it is expected that the contents be selected and treated pedagogically in such a way that the learner simultaneously reaches an understanding of the questions behind the principled knowledge embedded in the

selected contents. The idea is to reveal to the learners that existing answers may not be the final or only ones. In this way, pedagogical learning aims at something beyond the existing content. CHAT has an object-focused way of regarding learning by focusing on the principles and structures present in the contradictions. The *object* of an activity system represents the *problem space* that the subject is working on. The activity directs, moulds and transforms into outcomes with the help of symbolic, internal, and external mediating artefacts.

Recognition

In the modern tradition of education to which NAT adheres, the concept of recognition (Anerkennung) is central. In his theory of justice, Fichte (2012) claims that both parties must recognise the other's freedom. In both approaches, the human capacity to learn as well as the learner's own activity are recognised as being decisive for successful learning. Also, conceptual education and learning are, by both approaches, recognised as necessities in a complex world because sole socialisation into and participation in human social practice do not include necessary conceptual clarification of observed phenomena; thus, they risk missing out on a deeper understanding of the very practice itself. In this sense, education is recognised not only as a possible but as a necessary cultural activity.

The Pedagogical Process

NAT describes the pedagogical process through the constitutive concepts of summoning and *bildsamkeit*. It is paramount to realise the non-affirmative nature of pedagogically relevant teaching, as advocated by NAT, which claims that teaching in a non-affirmative manner in a narrow sense means that the learner is being involved in the learning process through their own reflective and experimental activity. In a broad sense, non-affirmatively also includes the idea that the learner is not only learning the content through her activity but also reaching and understanding the principled insight knowledge or theory embedded in the selected teaching. In this sense, NAT embraces the idea of *educational teaching* as developed by Herbart. In a broad understanding of non-affirmative education, teaching in schools should not solely affirm the policies regulating the aims and contents of the curriculum, nor should it affirm the learner's life world or parental interests. Public education in democratic societies supports a teacher's right to question and problematise both a learner's experiences and existing interests in society. Through the such pedagogical activity, schools may create a truly reflective space for learners. Although assuming freedom as a point of departure, NAT argues that non-affirmative education is necessary for the subject to reach and exert cultural and political autonomy, among

and together with other similar subjects. In this respect, NAT represents education in and for a pluralist society (Uljens & Ylimäki, 2017).

As previously observed, CHAT is primarily seen as a theory of organisational learning. In the later versions of the approach, learning as innovation or expansion is at the forefront. Consequently, the approach lacks distinct definitions of the nature of the pedagogical activity. Instead, CHAT regards the concept of *need* as a point of departure for learning. Thus, learning is seen as something expansive that takes place through different steps of contradiction (need state, double bind, resistance) in a dynamic model in order to reach a concrete solution to a problem (Engeström, 1999). When the initial dilemma finds a resolution, the object is renegotiated, and then the cycle begins again. However, we argue that instead of seeing CHAT as an outspoken pedagogical theory (i.e., intervention in a learning process), the cyclic model explaining the relationship between and steps from one phase to another may be read as a conceptualisation of the pedagogical activity itself. No step depicted in the model occurs by any logical necessity; it has to be put into motion. An original need state may of course arise from the practice itself, yet this contradiction must be identified as such. If read this way, the dynamic structure of CHAT reveals itself as a learning process that is driven by sequentially ordered pedagogical initiatives.

The Context of Learning

In our analysis, we have noticed that in both NAT and CHAT, the question of *where* (i.e., not only the *what*-, *how*-, and *why* questions) is of importance. Learning and pedagogical activity cannot be properly understood if they are decontextualised but are differently emphasised. CHAT takes into consideration a multitude of factors that impact different research phenomena and makes the research data empirically accessible (Langemeyer, 2005). This leads to a nuanced empirical analysis and indicates that the learning processes in different contexts can be compared with each other, making knowledge accumulation possible.

On the other hand, a potential risk in the universalistic approach of CHAT is that the same analytical components are applied equally, regardless of the studied learning object, indicating that CHAT does not have an elaborated framework concerning *Bildung*. Both theories argue that learning is undetermined and not necessarily well-defined. NAT states that the pedagogue should act as if someone is already able to do something they have not yet done (Benner, 1987).

While NAT primarily focuses on activities that take place in institutional pedagogical settings framed by a collectively agreed-upon curriculum (i.e., schools), CHAT, in turn, appears to be mostly focused on learning occurring in *any* setting or organisation. In this respect, CHAT is more universal, whereas NAT is more particularist. Yet, CHAT is a highly relevant approach if the focus is on how the school as an organisation changes in terms of learning. The focus would then be turned on teacher's and leader's collaborative culture. CHAT proposes analytical tools for the development of institutionalised education, makes obstacles visible,

and improves ways of creating sustainable change processes (Sannino & Nocon, 2008). In turn, NAT is valid for any such organisational change, in schools or anywhere, that involves pedagogical activity aimed at initiating processes of learning. In this respect, the dynamic cycle of expansive learning in CHAT, operating through the different steps of contradictions, may be interpreted as summoning participants to collaborative and individual self-activity. The notion of *bildsamkeit* would then describe the learners' part of the process.

Cultural and Historical Context

Furthermore, both approaches argue for processes of Bildung and learning being historically grounded given social and cultural settings. The cultural-historical features in CHAT are visible through the concept of historicity and in the lower part of the activity system (e.g. community, rules, division of labour). NAT regards the different societal levels (e.g. education, economics, politics, ethics) from a non-hierarchical vantage point, indicating, for example, that education is neither subordinate nor superordinate in relation to politics. Instead, there is a continuous tension between the societal fields of practise. Sometimes these practises contradicting. In CHAT, this way of thinking is present in the concepts of contradictions within and between activity systems. For unpredictable contradictions to occur, an open dynamic between systems must be assumed. Consequently, CHAT represents an idea of interacting activity systems being non-hierarchical.

In NAT, the pedagogue is perceived as an interpretative or hermeneutic mediator between contextual dimensions and learners. In NAT, the second regulative principle asks how societal interests transform into pedagogical practise, thereby underscoring the importance of carrying out the pedagogical translational activity in such a way that it involves the learner as an active and reflective participant in the process. This relational teaching-studying-learning process (summoning self-activity and *bildsamkeit*) aims for autonomy and culturally productive freedom on the learner's side. In this limited respect, NAT is normative; cultural, political, economic, and personal autonomy is what education in a democracy should aim towards. CHAT does not raise questions of emancipation or normativity that are typical in education theory. Instead, value issues emanate from historicity and local struggle, not from detailed predefined normative rules or goals. Yet, at least indirectly, a normative ambition of voicing participation guides CHAT. It thus seems clear that CHAT operates similarly to and with the same ideals expressed as NAT. In CHAT, plurality is expressed through the concept of multi-voicedness, and such plurality is regarded as the basis in and for a democratic society. According to CHAT, multi-voicedness occurs in different activity systems. Multi-voicedness and contradictions, as concepts, overlap in the sense that multiple voices indicate that contradictions are inevitable (Engeström, 2001). Such a social ontology is coherent with the foundations of NAT. Both approaches seem to consider the plurality of interests between individuals and societal practises as a point of departure as well as

something to be aimed for in a democratic society. Both approaches are emancipatory but in non-affirmative ways, as neither represents a prescriptive or normative critical theory of education externally defining the aims to be reached. While NAT focuses especially on school education, arguing that school learning and teaching differ from other societal forms of learning, CHAT provides an elaborate conceptual system suitable for any learning context.

Epistemological Comparison

By epistemological analysis, we primarily refer to how each approach argues that empirical research may contribute to an increased understanding of education and learning. Given this, the analysis includes research methodology.

In its research, CHAT is more empirically and intervention oriented, considering that the research process itself is a mediating process for studying human development and learning. Generally, a subject within an activity system mediates with the help of artefacts within the activity system. Mediation can be a pedagogical activity depending on both the nature of the activity system and the object, in interventionist research, the research itself operates as a mediating activity. NAT, on the other hand, is not as empirically and methodologically deliberated, and has, up until recent years, focused mainly on theoretical and conceptual development.

The learning process in CHAT often includes the formulation of a clear aim towards which the activity system is working. This aim emanates from how the initial need state is perceived and defined. It is thus crucial to how the contradictions within the components in the activity system are explored and who participates in this process of defining the original problem. As CHAT belongs to a family of developmental work research, this research aims to reach concrete solutions to given problems. The learning process is followed by dividing the organisation into several components that have different impacts on the organisation and the activities taking place within it (Sannino, 2020). The aim is to develop the organisation itself to withstand similar contradictions in the future and to intertwine them into the activity system.

Normativity

A distinction can be made concerning the way the theories discuss the moral dimension of pedagogical activity. In NAT, there is an elaborate framework for handling moral dilemmas, which is visible throughout the descriptions of the core constitutive principles. NAT is about recognising the other as free and validating the other otherness as well as about summoning the learners' self-activity to become a cultural reasoning and self-reflective subject. Conversely, CHAT does not handle

morality as distinctively. Moral issues are indirectly present within the activity system’s *rules*, which include judicial and social rules, among others. The rules are dependent on the context. In this analysis, CHAT is seen as a system theory, making the theory less focused on political and moral questions. Based on this, CHAT does not make explicit any elaborate value framework. It represents a version of systems-oriented analytical structuralism. The handling of morality in CHAT is not transparent when it comes to understanding the concept of rules.

To conclude, the first difference between these theories is that they have different areas of focus, one being the question of normativity, which is the legitimisation of educational influence. NAT focuses on the moral conditions that have to be achieved for a pedagogical intervention to be seen as legitimate. This is the focus of other areas of social practises, for example, health care and therapy (Uljens, 1997). To make visible the similarities and differences in how the theories differ in a normative, ontological and epistemological matter, we have compiled this in Table 11.2.

Table 11.2 Similarities and differences between NAT and CHAT

Research questions	NAT	CHAT
Ontological similarities	ZPD, summoning self-activity and <i>Bildsamkeit</i> describes the same pedagogical process, but does this with divergent concepts. Both include an competent other in order for the learner to self actively acquire new knowledge Both recognises humans as free with a possibility to reach their own voice, Human learning and activity is historical, social and cultural	
Ontological differences	Hermeneutical-pedagogical Regional ontological within institutionalised education Focuses on teaching in schools Focuses on education as a specific societal field Aim of learning is not only to answer a specific question and not to guide the learner towards a specific worldview Teaching aims to reach general abilities, give voice and act according to one’s own and others’ interests (political, cultural and societal autonomy) NAT focuses on questions of who, what, why, where and how from a pedagogical perspective NAT is a theory of the nature of pedagogical activity	Multi-disciplinary with a pedagogical-psychological approach Universal approach applying one conceptual system to any practise Focuses on learning All societal fields are subordinated to rules, community, division of labour and tools within the activity system Aim of learning to solve a specific problem within an activity system through expansive learning CHAT focuses on questions of who, what, why, where and how from a learner’s perspective CHAT is a theory and methodological approach of intervening in and changing any existing human and societal practise

(continued)

Table 11.2 (continued)

Research questions	NAT	CHAT
Epistemological differences	Uses an interpretative and hermeneutical approach Not limited when it comes to empirical research methodology May be used as a theoretical frame for different types of empirical research	Developed analytical and methodical approach to explain specific research phenomena Intervention based with the researcher being a part of the research Analyses human development and learning as mediating processes and develops conceptual tools for understanding contextual factors that shape human action
Question of normativity	NAT states that the pedagogue should act as if someone is already able to do something they have not yet done; this is done through pre-planned pedagogical experiments CHAT states that knowledge and skills are being learned as they are being created CHAT emphasises that learning and the achievement of knowledge are two sides to the same process Neither is guided towards a determined outcome or a specific worldview	
Differences regarding normativity	NAT emphasises how to teach someone something with the goal of making the learner morally and ethically responsible Framework for handling moral dilemmas, visible throughout constitutive principles	CHAT accentuates how an individual learns and does not have an elaborated framework concerning Bildung Focuses on the activity with a clear goal to work towards Morality found within activity systems rules

Concluding Remarks

Before concluding, it is worth mentioning that both theories are constantly evolving. There are, for example, efforts to evolve the fourth generation of activity theory that addresses social and peer production in which the boundaries fade and the distinction between processes and structure is obsolete (Spinuzzi & Guile, 2019). Moreover, efforts to further conceptualise pedagogical interactions have also been conducted through Wells' (2002) work on the importance of dialogue and how semiotic artefacts account for the co-construction of meaning between two or more participants. In NAT, there are efforts to expand upon research approaches to create opportunities for reflections on action theory (Benner et al., 2015). These developments are not taken into account in this article, it is mainly to highlight that theorising is an ever-evolving process that is never completed.

In this study, we set out to investigate how CHAT and NAT position themselves regarding the questions of ontology, normativity, and epistemology. The main emphasis came to be on the question of ontology due to its central character in the theory-praxis dilemma. Both theories highlight the cultural, historical, and

institutional context, as human learning has to be understood in regard to spatial and temporal factors. The activity system, as a model, provides CHAT with a nuanced conceptual apparatus to capture contextual factors. NAT is also sensitive to context, which is evident through regulative principles. These principles raise the question of how societal interests translate into education praxis.

Both theories regard the learner's own activity as pivotal for the learning process. Both consider reaching autonomy and emancipation as the pivotal aim, in order for the individual to be able to act more independently in the world. Both theories are emancipatory, but not in an ideologically loaded sense.

NAT is more of an analytical theory for understanding the nature of pedagogical practitioners' activity and reflections with pedagogical motives. NAT is interested in providing a language for talking about what education is and how pedagogues organise situations and contents that recognise the learner but at the same time challenge learner's abilities, knowledge, and experiences. In NAT, the crucial pedagogical act is an intervention; it is a summoning of the learner's self-activity. In school, teaching *construct* situations where the learner's previous experiences are problematised in order to create a motivational moment is delicate but crucial. As an incentive, the change process in CHAT requires identifying an *existing* contradiction, and the aim is to work, in a goal-oriented fashion, toward a specific outcome and to change praxis. CHAT aims to find out other forms of operational practises that do not continue to raise previously identified contradictions.

To conclude, we see these approaches emanating from similar, modern roots of European educational thinking criticising Kantian transcendental idealism, instead of viewing the empirical Other as the fundamental reference point for human growth. Above, we have pointed out many differences as well. Yet, we see them as both different and congruent enough to inspire each other. For example, we can envisage an approach where we apply NAT to conceptually understand and empirically explore teachers' pedagogical and curricular work with students in a school. However, for understanding and contributing to school development, as well as leadership of such change, we see CHAT as a fruitful approach. In fact, some steps in such a direction exist (Uljens & Smeds-Nylund, 2021). When understanding workplace development, the argument is that we need a theory of the object to be developed. In other words, school development must be built on some conceptual idea of what a school and its activities are like. This does not mean that the participants themselves must share such a theoretical view. Rather, the participants' experiences must be empirically brought to the fore. Nonetheless, we, as researchers, need a conceptual platform for our own intervention. This requires school developmental research to build on education theory. Given that leading school development also contains pedagogical dimensions these need to be pedagogically theorised. We see that NAT provides us with a theory for both of these aspects – understanding teaching and understanding the pedagogical dimension of school leadership activity. Yet, we see that CHAT provides a more elaborate program or concept for designing workplace change processes. We see the various contradictory steps as a version of a non-affirmative summoning of participant's practises. Since both theories are complex and ever-developing, this chapter is perhaps to be seen as

a starting point for a continued dialogue on NAT and CHAT, offering some initial indications of future possibilities within the educational theory.

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Chapter 12

Understanding Municipal Education Leaders in the Tension Between Politics, Professionals and Parents



Ann-Sofie Smeds-Nylund

Abstract This chapter explores how non-affirmative theories, such as NAT and discursive institutionalism, can complement each other when investigating educational and pedagogical leadership. Public policies, laws, and interests are transformed into pedagogical practice at the municipal level, and the educational leadership mediates between several practices. In many countries, a more liberal education policy has given rise to demands for clearer parental influence in schools. Public decision-making processes regarding educational issues change when more actors demand their voices be heard. In which educational issues is it then beneficial to initiate an extended debate and involve citizens? In the municipal context, a communicative discourse about education is to be preferred, although a coordinative discourse would be legal and correct. Everyone with an interest in the local school should have the opportunity to use their voice. We need ongoing, enlightened conversations about education, pedagogy, and *Bildung* at the municipal and local levels in our society.

Keywords Discursive institutionalism · Non-affirmative education · Educational leadership

Introduction

Within a democratic society, educational leadership in a municipal context is operationalised as shared leadership, according to which elected representatives and holders of municipal offices work together to create educational opportunities for the municipal population. The educational conditions and laws vary between countries, but to a certain extent, the experiences of municipalities are comparable across

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© The Author(s) 2023
M. Uljens (ed.), *Non-affirmative Theory of Education and Bildung*,
Educational Governance Research 20,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30551-1_12

national borders. Educational decisions are made in close proximity to those who are affected by them—close to guardians' and children's everyday lives.

Municipalities in Nordic countries have a high degree of autonomy but operate according to national legislation and under the influence of a transnational discourse, which poses challenges for public education leadership. In the context of municipal education policy, professionals and elected representatives meet to discuss governance issues. Office holders represent their areas of responsibility through their competence and expertise. Meanwhile, the elected representatives' mandate is determined based on the trust granted to them by the municipality's residents via political and democratic municipal elections. Multifaceted knowledge about the local community enables elected representatives to contribute to the development of solutions relevant to the municipal residents' lived reality. Democratic decision-making processes that are transparent at all stages are essential to the establishment of an open society.

Municipal educational leaders operate in various areas of social practice, and technological developments have facilitated the participation of guardians and citizens in the debates surrounding school development (both nationally and municipally). In many countries, a more liberal education policy has given rise to demands for clearer parental influence in schools. Conscious guardians know what rights their children are entitled to, and personnel in the education system are increasingly expected to anchor their decisions in current legislation. Public decision-making processes regarding educational issues change when more actors demand that their voices be heard.

Guardians' participation in school governance has varied over time and between communities. Already in 1899, Dewey wrote in *The School and Society* that what the best and wisest parents desired for their children, society must also strive to achieve for all children; all other ideals for schools would be narrow-minded and loveless and would destroy our democracy if put into practice. Everything that society has achieved is made available to future citizens through the mediation of schools (Dewey, 2004, p. 58).

The mediating task of educational leadership is challenging, and there is a need to develop strategies for sufficient transparency in decision-making processes. Thus, it is important to examine which topics are included in an expanded education debate, which actors comment on what, and which issues are of particular importance to the actors. For example, in which issues is it beneficial to involve citizens? Which cases require more limited and restrictive treatment within traditional institutional frameworks?

The questions surrounding the development of more inclusive educational leadership in municipalities are complex, and the context in which municipal decision-making pertinent to educational matters occurs needs to be investigated.

This chapter begins by describing the context of educational leadership in municipalities. *Non-affirmative theory* (NAT) is discussed in detail in this book. Thus, only the position of educational leadership as a mediator between different practices is discussed in this chapter. In this chapter, *discursive institutionalism* (DI)

is used as a framework to understand the ideas prevalent in the discourse; thus, a brief discussion about DI is included. Finally, DI is used to discuss the regulative and constitutive concepts in NAT to make sense of how municipal education leaders mediate between politics, professionals, and parents.

The Context of Educational Leadership in a Municipality

This chapter's pedagogical and theoretical frame of reference consists of non-affirmatively inspired (Benner, 2001) interpretations of a pedagogical leadership perspective. In democratically functioning education administrations, this means that pedagogical leaders, elected representatives, teachers, and citizens are allowed and required to participate in the joint decisions that affect a country, a municipality, or a school's educational activities (Uljens & Rajakaltio, 2017). With the help of theories of non-affirmative pedagogical leadership, one can examine a municipal education system's decision-making processes using a triangle model.

In the triangular illustration presented in Fig. 12.1, the municipality's active politicians, elected representatives, and officeholders are placed at the centre of the model because their influence on educational matters in a municipality is important and regulated by national laws and municipal steering documents. The education system, which includes the director of education, operates within these laws and steering documents and is led by the education committee within the framework specified by the municipal council. The object of decision-making is the school, including pupils, teachers, principals, and personnel, and their pedagogical activities are represented by the didactic triangle. Guardians and other citizens are placed

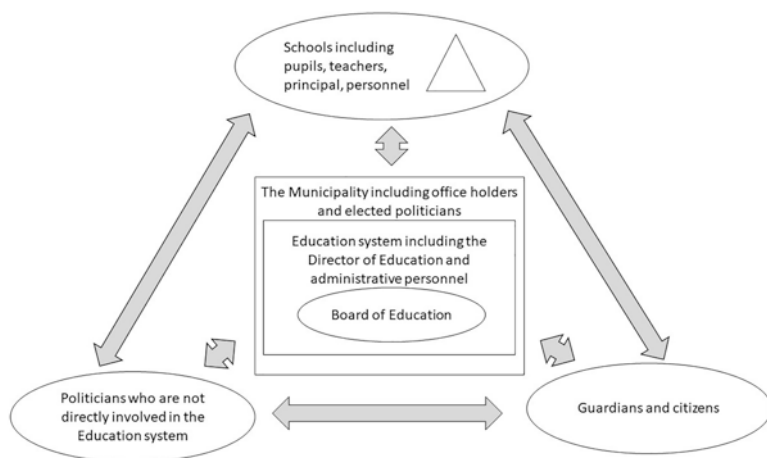


Fig. 12.1 Educational leadership in a municipal context. (Smeds-Nylund, 2019)

in one corner. Meanwhile, active politicians who participate in a public debate but are not directly involved in the education system are placed in another corner. Between all these actors are two-way arrows that show the process through which they communicate and exert influence on one another. Within the local context, there are many personal relationships, and communication between people can be lively. Thus, the communicative context is rich and can be explored.

Non-affirmative Theory

Because public, non-affirmative pedagogical leadership is exercised in open institutions that are influenced by other institutions within the broader society, this chapter was written for the field of a pedagogical science and is based on a kind of practical philosophical thinking. It places itself in a fourfold field of pedagogy, politics, law, and ethics, with pedagogical leadership in the middle, mediating between all the other praxis.

The praxeological perspective understands a democratic society as characterised by a view in which all forms of practice are in a dynamic and non-hierarchical relationship with each other. A nation's constitution describes how political power in that country is exercised, but politics has power over the constitution. The state, the economy, morality, and religion can place demands on the younger generations, but they are still free to make their own choices about the future. Modern pedagogy does not know of any universal hierarchy of values in modern society (Benner, 2001, 2005). Pedagogy cannot be completely subordinated to political, cultural, or religious ideas, and it is not more important than politics; similarly, politics is not more important than pedagogy, even if both are value-bound engagements (Uljens, 2014).

Pedagogical leadership is exercised in discursive fields of tension between different forms of societal practice. Public service holders execute political decisions, but through their activities, they also influence political decision-making. In relation to other forms of practice, the pedagogical leader is in a mediating position, and it is their mission as pedagogues to remind, for example, politicians of pedagogical theory and practice, as well as the law's limitations in both debate and decision-making processes.

Through the basic concepts of *recognition* and *Bildsamkeit* (i.e., summons to self-activity) as tools (Uljens in this book), we can understand pedagogical leadership as an activity that, through summons to self-activity based on mutual recognition, strives to influence others' understanding of themselves, the world, and the relationships between them. By recognising the other as principally autonomous, the end result of a pedagogical leadership intervention is always (to some extent) open. One consequence of people thinking of and understanding the world in new ways is that they may act in new and unexpected ways (Elo, 2021).

Discursive Institutionalism (DI)

Pedagogical leadership is exercised in an institutional context, and to understand the ideas, processes, and discourses that make up pedagogical leadership, DI (Schmidt, 2002) is used here. NAT offers a language—a theory—about education and educational leadership, and DI provides a framework for understanding how educational and political (leadership) ideas are transformed in discourse.

Ideas and Discourses

DI places ideas and discourses in an institutional context. Schmidt (2020) sees *ideas*—the substantial content of discourses—as structures that are constantly changing and malleable and that are constantly reconstructed by conscious actors, who can also unconsciously change them while they are used. Within DI, ideas are regarded as part of the actor’s manifestation of their ideational background ability; however, the actor can simultaneously consciously criticise the ideas while they are used as part of their discursive foreground ability (Schmidt, 2020).

Mehta (2011) stated that political researchers’ use of ideas tends to occur at three different levels of generalisability:

1. Ideas can, in a limited sense, be *political solutions*, such as decisions to reduce the size of teaching groups. The implication, then, is that the problem occurs if the learning outcomes are weak and the goal is established in response to improving the learning outcomes. Furthermore, the ideas offer an opportunity to solve the problem and achieve the goals.
2. To understand political processes, one also needs an understanding of the role ideas to play in *defining problems*. A problem definition is a way of understanding a complex reality. How a problem is defined is an important factor in determining which political solutions are desirable. Many political discussions are about the level at which a problem should be defined and solved.
3. Furthermore, according to Mehta (2011), ideas can function as *general philosophies* or *zeitgeists*—broad ideas that go through different areas of society—and if they reach a level of assumptions that cannot be questioned, they will have a major impact on politics and society during the time in which they exist (Mehta, 2011).

According to Schmidt (2008), there are two kinds of ideas: *cognitive ideas* about ‘what is and what should be done’ and *normative ideas* that state ‘what is good or bad about what is’ and ‘what should be done’ (Schmidt, 2008, pp. 307–308). Cognitive ideas offer solutions to the problems that exist, define the problems to be solved, and identify methods for solving them. Cognitive ideas also consider how ideas are included in the deeper principle frameworks and norms within relevant

sciences or technical practices. By referring to the suitability of ideas, normative ideas bind values to political action and legitimise work. Normative ideas represent the public's aspirations and ideals and how they relate to principles and norms in public life. Furthermore, normative ideas can apply to values and norms that have recently emerged in a society or to long-term values that are part of a society's culture (Schmidt, 2002, 2008).

To find out how ideas are transformed from thought to action and how actors express them, Schmidt turned to the concept of *discourse*. For Schmidt, discourse includes not only what is said but also to whom and how an idea is said, as well as why and where it is said (Schmidt, 2008). Discourse can be defined as an interactive process in which principles are constructed and communicated in an institutional context (Schmidt, 2003).

Discourse includes ideas both as they are represented and in the interactive process through which they are conveyed. The ideas articulated in discourse are not easy to separate from the interests or institutional interactions expressed in the discourse, nor are they easy to separate from the interactions that create the forms of expression or from the cultural norms that frame the discourse. Thus, discourse can be seen as one of several variables that affect events and as a defining 'variable' because it makes it possible for public actors to create new ideas instead of just reflecting on them. Therefore, discourse makes it possible to map alternative patterns instead of simply following old patterns, and it reformulates cultural norms instead of only exemplifying them (Schmidt, 2003). Additionally, descriptions of the discursive process contribute to explanations of why some ideas are successful, and others are not based on how, to whom, and where they are presented (Schmidt, 2008). In discourse, representations of ideas can be expressed on different levels as different types of ideas (cognitive or normative) and in different formats, such as narratives, myths, collective memories, stories, and images.

Education is part of the public sphere. The public sphere is funded according to the politics of a country. Political science focuses on the public sphere, but sometimes it is especially focused on the policy sphere, in which policy actors engage each other in *coordinative discourses* around political constructions. Furthermore, the focus is sometimes on the political sphere, where political actors engage the public in a *communicative discourse* on political constructions (Schmidt, 2002). In the policy sphere, coordinative discourse occurs among groups of individuals and groups that jointly construct policy and program ideas. Policy actors (e.g., service providers, experts, interest groups, and activists) work together in different ways to coordinate policies and agreements among themselves. Coordinative discourse can be maintained by individuals who share normative and cognitive ideas in a kind of epistemic community or by individuals who clearly share ideas and have the opportunity to create policies (Schmidt, 2008).

Whether discourse contributes to the success of an idea is determined by how discursive endeavours can articulate the substantial content of the idea and maintain consistency and contingency across sectors of society (Schmidt, 2008). Discourse becomes successful when it is relevant, adequate, applicable, and suitable for the context and is consistent and coherent across different spheres of society. Discourse

becomes successful when speakers direct their speeches to the right audience at the right time and in the right way. Thus, discursive messaging needs to be convincing both at the knowledge level and the content level and must be convincing in normative terms (Schmidt, 2008).

Institutions

DI treats institutions as the context in which actors think, speak, and act, and as the result of those thoughts, words, and actions. Actors' internal institutions function as structures or limitations. External institutions can be created and changed by actors. Actions within the framework of an institution are not seen as products of the actors' rational actions within the framework of appropriate norms and rules. Instead, they are processes in which actors create and maintain institutions according to their ideational backgrounds and abilities (Schmidt, 2008).

An actor's ideational background ability supports the actor's ability to handle situations in a given context of meaning (i.e., the ideational rules or rationality of that environment). Institutional action can also be dictated by actors discursive foreground abilities, through which they can change or maintain their institutions. Actors' idealistic background abilities and discursive foreground abilities represent the communicative logic that enables actors to think, speak, and act outside their institutions, even if they are within them. Actors can free themselves from institutionalised rules, even though they use them, and they can persuade each other to change or maintain institutions (Schmidt, 2008).

Power

For discursive institutionalists, power is not defined exclusively by an objective position because ideas and values affect how power is exercised. Specifically, ideas and values affect the subjective perception of the position and give power to actors, even when they may lack a position of power. This can apply, for example, to social movements and enterprising actors who set agendas in policy or political spheres.

Carstensen and Schmidt (2016) explored ideational power within DI and defined ideational power as the capacity of actors (individuals or groups) to influence other actors' normative and cognitive perceptions by using elements of ideas. *Power through ideas* means that actors can persuade other actors to accept and adopt their way of thinking and acting with the help of elements of ideas. *Power over ideas* is related to obligatory power and the position of power. *Power in ideas* means that ideas have become accepted to the extent that they are no longer questioned and have become invisible or taken for granted, even if they de facto influence the actions of other actors (Carstensen & Schmidt, 2016, p. 321).

Regulative Principles for Social Actions

NAT offers a language and a theory regarding education and educational leadership, while DI provides a framework for following and even understanding how educational and political ideas are transformed in discourse. In discourses, basic constitutive concepts of individual aspects and basic regulatory concepts of social aspects can be followed (see Fig. 12.2). As DI provides us with a framework for following how theories of education are transformed in society in a municipality, it concerns the processes that can be observed in Benner’s figure below, where the theory of education and Bildung are combined with basic concepts of individual and social aspects.

As shown in Fig. 12.1, the municipal educational institution is extremely complex because the ideas that steer municipal education are formed both nationally and municipally; they are both internal and external, and they are constantly transformed by reforms interpreted by both national and municipal actors. Sometimes, political considerations and power over ideas (i.e., positional power) dominate. Other times, it is educational leadership grounded in pedagogical and scientific ideas and the power to influence through and in ideas that dominate, although the practice forms are in a non-hierarchical relationship.

The discussion about non-affirmative educational leadership in a municipality in terms of DI can begin with Item (4) of Fig. 12.2, which highlights problems in society that need to be solved or developed through reforms. National educational

	<i>Constitutive basic concepts of the individual aspect</i>	<i>Regulative basic concepts of the social aspect</i>
A Theories of education (Erziehung) (2:3)	(1) Summoning to self-activity	(3) Pedagogical transformation of societal influences and requirements
B Theories of Bildung (1:4)	(2) <i>Bildsamkeit (Bildsamkeit)</i> as attunement (<i>Bestimmtheit</i>) of humans to receptive and spontaneous corporeity, freedom, historicity and linguisticity	(4) Non-hierarchical order of cultural and societal practices
C Theories of educational institutions and their reform (1/2:3/4)		

Fig. 12.2 Four basic concepts of pedagogical thinking and acting with associated theories of education and Bildung (*Erziehungs- und Bildungstheorien*). (Benner, Chap. 2, this volume)

reforms are negotiated and depend on political power relations. The discourse can be coordinative or communicative, depending on what power relations and ideas are expressed in it. Sometimes, higher educational leadership cooperatively steers the discourse, and at other times, the public is involved or demands to be involved. At both the national and municipal levels, the actors are often political parties and organisations, such as a strong teachers' union.

As national educational laws and reforms pour down from the national to the municipal level, another discourse that involves local politicians, educational officials, and parents is launched. The local discourse depends on the strength of the steering instruments used at the national level to achieve the reform and whether they are laws that need to be strictly followed or only recommendations that can be locally applied by relatively autonomous municipalities. National curriculum reforms are examples of reforms that are strongly demanding but with negotiable details at the municipal level. This is the case in Finland, for example.

Autonomous municipalities can reform their educational systems without national influence. Those that reformers consider (schools with teachers) are, therefore, closer to those in the municipality who make the decisions, and again, internal and external institutions are affected by ideas evolving through coordinative or communicative discourse. Every citizen has educational experience, and many municipal citizens have children enrolled in schools that are to be reformed. Therefore, every citizen has the opportunity to make their voice heard. Still, as municipal power relations and strategies vary, it might be demanding for citizens to be involved in educational reform matters in a municipality, and they might rely on their elected representatives. National laws and scientific influence are important in granting pupils freedom—in determining children's right to choose their own destinies. If municipal economic and political power interests or municipal traditions are powerful, pupils' freedom might be negatively affected or compromised.

If reforms have been decided upon and the 'what' behind them is reasonably clear, then the reforms move to the 'how', as observed in Item 3 of Fig. 12.2, pedagogical transformation and societal influences and requirements. Because pedagogical reforms always have economic implications, the elected municipal representatives still have power over the ideas. Here, however, the discourse might be dominated more by educational officers with a background in the educational sciences. Every citizen has had an educational experience, but if they are not particularly interested in educational matters, they might lean on tradition and experiences from their own schooling from years past to inform their opinions on the actual reform. Here, educational officers, elected representatives on educational boards, principals, and teachers can choose to involve citizens and parents in communicative discourse about the reform, thus enabling every actor's internal institution to make sense of the external institutional changes that are needed to lead to the best reform policy. Societal changes can be difficult to implement, and this especially applies to changes to old societal institutions, such as education.

The basic constitutive concepts of individual aspects leading to the summoning of self-activity (1) are obvious through (3) and (4) in Fig. 12.2 because it is human actors who invent and implement ideas and reforms, although they are situated in

external educational institutions. However, if one continues with the example of a municipality having decided upon a reform, then the summoning to self-activity (1) in Fig. 12.2 on every level is also obvious. The chair of the educational board summons the director of education to implement the reform. The director then gathers together the principals in the municipality in meetings, summoning them to self-activity as a very concrete act of pedagogical leadership. The principals take the reform ideas to their schools and present them to the teachers, and so on. The schools invite parents to discuss how the reform might be implemented in the local schools. However, if we believe in non-affirmative educational leadership, we cannot know exactly how every actor will interpret the summoning; the end result is open. The well-educated autonomous educational staff will interpret the reform according to local conditions, continue the discourses, and thus, by working together, change the ideas and the internal and external institutions.

Again, if we consider non-affirmative educational leadership and autonomous actors, the reform ideas can come from below as well—not as top-down ideas but as bottom-up ideas and discourses. Power in ideas can be executed by local actors who see a need for reform, get other citizens to join them, and create a discourse so strong that it changes the internal and external institutions in the democratic municipality. Power in ideas can also be executed by local actors who are against reform, and they might involve local media, social media, and influential groups in acts of resistance.

Discussion

A non-affirmative interpretation of pedagogical leadership in a democratic education system means that pedagogical leaders, elected representatives, teachers, and citizens are allowed and required to participate in the joint decisions that affect a country, municipality, or school's educational activities (Uljens & Rajakaltio, 2017). NAT offers a language for educational theories but not for structure—for how ideas evolve in changing institutions in discourses. Thus, NAT was complemented by DI.

The DI and NAT originate from different fields of science, but both can be used to investigate and describe public society and places of education. The education system is value-bound, and the ideas that promote educational progress can be assessed at different societal levels. Ideas can be traced both at the general-society level (i.e., national discourses on the role of education and upbringing in contemporary society) and at the individual level. The transformation of ideas can be followed at different levels of society (e.g., from transnational and national policy levels to everyday pedagogical conditions in schools and municipalities, and vice versa). Actors' freedom to act at various levels is framed by current laws, but from a non-affirmative perspective, actors can and must pursue their ideas through public debates and activities.

The intention was to explore how NAT and DI could complement each other to expand the investigation into educational and pedagogical leadership and how

public interests are transformed into pedagogical practice. On which issues is it beneficial to initiate an extended debate and involve citizens? Which cases require more limited and restrictive treatment within traditional institutional frameworks? NAT offers a language—a theory to explain pedagogy and pedagogical leadership—while DI offers a framework for how pedagogical and political leadership ideas are transformed into discourse.

According to the NAT perspective and as informed by the concepts of *Bildsamkeit*, encouragement of self-activity, and the non-hierarchical order relationship, all actors possess the freedom to act and the opportunity to take the initiative and provoke discussions and public debates on matters that they consider important.

In this context, central concepts taken from DI are idea, discourse, and institution because the text touches on leadership power. DI deals with the everyday activities of actors and organisations. Furthermore, DI provides insight into the processes that occur behind official discourses and allows room for an understanding of how non-affirmative pedagogical leadership is exercised. By accepting DI's conceptual apparatus in relation to the education department's pedagogical leadership, the ideational background ability of leadership can be expressed as supporting its discourse-driven foreground ability to maintain or change the educational institutions they lead. If the internal institutions of leadership correspond to those of other actors in this context, the activities of the joint external institution may be strengthened. If they differ, the discursive abilities of all actors are involved, and the common internal and external institutions may change. The department of education is sometimes externally reformed to respond to societal needs; at that stage, everyone's internal institutions are challenged, and non-affirmative pedagogical leadership is then challenged to create new joint internal and external institutions by encouraging actors to self-activity and believing in everyone's ability to learn new things and change.

If educational and pedagogical leadership agree with NAT, they might find themselves mediating between different praxis to preserve and maintain the freedom of the pupil to develop according to their own needs and ambitions. All actors in the municipality can take part in the discourse about what local schools should and could be. There can be high expectations for how the school, as an institution, should maintain local society, especially since many countries, such as Finland, value education and have seen their country prosper due to rising educational levels. In Finland, for instance, the national constitution and education laws are clear about the rights of youth, and society and caretakers need to keep that in mind when school reforms take place. The questions posed at the beginning of the chapter—*In which issues is it beneficial to involve citizens? Which cases require more limited and restrictive treatment within traditional institutional frameworks?* It can be answered separately from decisions regarding people and matters that require secrecy. In this context, a communicative discourse about education in a municipality is preferred, although a coordinative discourse is legal and correct. Everyone with an interest in the local school should have the opportunity to use their voice.

Within DI, ideas are the substantial content of discourse, and it is through discourse that ideas are shaped and reshaped. Pedagogical leadership contributes to the change of ideas in discourse at all levels of society. At the time of writing, the

COVID-19 pandemic was ongoing. Over the last 2 years, the educational system has had to adapt to new situations and function at a distance, with only some groups or all pupils in school and staff in or out of schools depending on the infection rate. Decisions about the work of schools have been made at the highest national, regional, and local municipal levels. Educational leadership has been challenged in ways never before experienced, and different societal norms are now visible like never before. Similarly, the different social circumstances in which young people live and the inequalities that need to be addressed are more visible than ever. The mediating role of non-affirmative educational and pedagogical leadership will be much needed in the near future and must be strengthened. We need ongoing, enlightened conversations about education, pedagogy, and *Bildung* at the local level.

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Part V
Non-affirmative Education Perspectives
on Governance and Policy

Chapter 13

Operating in an Outcomes-Based and a Democratic Bildung Discourse



Lejf Moos

Abstract This chapter presupposes that educational practices should build on multiple sources, theories, and influences: educational philosophy, didactics, culture, policy, power, and governance, to mention the most important. A concept of discourse is introduced in order to analyse and discuss the contemporary situation. Discourses allow us to organise and structure our knowledge and apply fundamental perspectives. Two main perspectives that emerge from diverse forms of societal governance and policy are introduced and discussed: A Democratic Bildung Discourse and an Outcomes-based Discourse, which emerge in a social democratic welfare state and a neoliberal competitive state, respectively. Governance is often supported by social technologies. Governance through contracts is used increasingly often. Its operation through soft power, standards, measurement, and strategy are discussed and criticised with concepts of general education and democratic Bildung. This is also the basis for criticism of the fast-growing use of online digital technologies such as learning platforms. In light of this new situation, we need to seriously reflect on appropriate theories and practices of education.

Keywords Democratic Bildung discourse · Outcomes-based discourse

Introduction

Educational practices have a complex and intertwined foundation in the awareness of multiple contexts and relations and in reflection guided by theories, values, and experiences.

The development of a non-affirmative education *theory* is a productive move to combine comprehensive philosophies and explicit values about society and human beings, and their relationships, with fundamental analyses of the realities and

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M. Uljens (ed.), *Non-affirmative Theory of Education and Bildung*,
Educational Governance Research 20,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30551-1_13

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discourses that surround educational practices. The societal purpose of education, educational institutions, and of leadership should be the points of departure for theorising and should guide the analyses of the interests and power vested in educational practices and the development of non-affirmative concepts and educational theory.

Both philosophy and context influence our thinking about education. In some cases, influences are open and transparent, but often they are hidden and obscure. Both kinds of influence work and make their mark on our reflections. Thus, we need to have critical perspectives on all the sources in the areas in which education is embedded: education and Bildung, culture, policy, power, and governance.

- Educational practices are about theories of education (Bildung), because education, teaching, and learning at schools follow their own type of logic.
- Education is *culture* because it is part of nation-building. Thus, education is a pivotal societal institution.
- Education is *policy* because it prepares individuals for working life and a good life' in general.
- Education is *power* because it shapes relations between social groups and individuals. It develops a general sense of what constitutes valid and valuable knowledge and a good community.
- Education is *governance* because the state uses education to establish its position in global competition and transnational cultures. Thus, education is national and at the same time transnational and global.

In this chapter, such analyses of contemporary policies, governance, power, culture, and education are conducted and criticised from a non-affirmative educational perspective. The fields build on theories of various kinds because the practices we wish to discuss are complex and multi-layered. Educational practices are influenced by multiple relationships. As the intention of this chapter is to take a profound look at influences on education from many sources, we structure the analyses and discussion in discourses.

Discourses

Discourses are a major aspect and theme of social and sociological analyses. Here, 'discourse' is understood as a form of argumentation and a way of structuring the world. Schneider (2013) describes discourse as '*communication practices that systematically construct our knowledge of reality*'. The media used for communication are language, non-verbal communication, and visual communication. Communication expresses human thought and thus constructs a cognitive framework with normative foundations that is open to enlightenment and manipulation (Fairclough, 1995). Discourses affect social relations through their real physical outcomes in our environment.

With inspiration from Norman Faircloth (1995), among others, such analyses of relations between language and power integrate analyses of texts, analyses of text

production processes and distribution, and sociocultural analyses of the discursive event as a whole (p. 23). This understanding may include non-human agents (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010), such as social technologies and manuals. To add to this understanding and dig a bit deeper into the concept of influence and power that is based on Foucault's post-structural perspective, *influence, and power may be described as a network of relationships where the poles (the agents) are defined by the relationships of which they are a part*. For example, the special relationship between teaching and education defines the teacher as well as the student. The teacher would not be a teacher without a student, and vice versa. Another example is that of prisoners and their guards. The relationship, not the poles, defines the aspects of power and influence. Therefore, power is productive and relational. *Influence is communication between a minimum of two parties or agents* (Foucault, 1983).

Foucault explicitly questioned how discourse influences people's mentality and prompts them to govern themselves in certain ways – a process he called 'governmentality'. Throughout his work, Foucault showed how specific opinions were formed and preserved to establish what is now commonly called the hegemonic or dominant discourse – society's dominant viewpoint(s), kept stable by the dynamics of political power (Foucault, 1972; Schneider, 2013). Thus, discourses are instrumental in making people think 'correctly', or affirmatively, according to the constructors or institutions of a given discourse, about what the core and most important schooling and educational practices are.

Discourses may assume positions of dominance relative to other discourses: Dominant discourses are the spoken, written, and behavioural expectations and models that we all share as a cultural group. This also makes them normative, meaning that they are based on our expectations as a social group.

The concept of discourse is used to focus on the influences between agents and sources in order to get an understanding of general themes and the interconnected and often interacting power opportunities. It is thus a way of describing and structuring major interrelated tendencies in the thinking and enacting of sections of the world and phenomena in them. When applying discourse theory, we may bring to the foreground the interrelated trends in many kinds of influences, be they political, cultural, technical, or other.

The analyses in this chapter are based on analyses and discussions of two discourses: an 'outcomes-based discourse', and a 'democratic Bildung discourse' (Moos, 2017a; Moos & Wubbels, 2018).

The First of Two Discourses

The democratic Bildung discourse emerged from the social democratic, post-World War II welfare state model but built partly on theories that were developed prior to the war. We call this understanding of general and comprehensive education – based on the works of John Dewey (1916/2005), Wolfgang Klafki (2001) and Dietrich Benner (2021), among other theorists – Democratic Bildung because its central

intention is to help children position themselves in the world, in democratic communities and societies, in ways that make them competent to understand and deliberate with other people (Moos & Wubbels, 2018).

John Dewey (1916/2005) strongly advocated the need for democracy in society and schools, and thus also for developing education that would prepare students to participate in a democracy by developing democratic habits through practice:

A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of jointly communicated experience. (Dewey, 1916/2005, p. 87)

Wolfgang Klafki (2001) understands general and comprehensive education as democratic education because its intention is to position children in the world, in democratic communities and societies, in ways that help them develop competence to understand and deliberate with others. Klafki sums up his discussion with three points: general education must be education for everybody to develop the capacity for self-determination (Selbstbestimmung), the ability to participate (Mitbestimmung), and the capacity for solidarity (Solidaritätsfähigkeit) (Klafki, 1983).

The third principal line of thinking in the democratic Bildung discourse is Dietrich Benner's theory of non-affirmative education (Benner, 2021; Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017), which I present very briefly, together with the principal ideas of two of his colleagues, Michael Uljens and Alexander von Oettingen. A fundamental theme in this theory, and thus at the very heart of this discourse, is the discussion of the fundamental educational paradox:

How is it possible – through external influence – to bring human beings to a state where they are not controlled by external influences? (Nelson, 1970, p. 349; Oettingen, 2001)

Two fundamental principles may make it possible to surmount this paradox: the child's sense of plasticity and the call for 'self-reflection'. *Bildsamkeit* is the fundamental, innate ability (and willingness, we should add) to be open-minded and to participate in a shared praxis. This concept acknowledges the child's 'not-yet-condition' – it has not yet become what it is going to be – but it must participate in educational interactions in order to become human. 'Self-reflection' means that the self is able to focus its attention on something in the outer world and, at the same time, on herself or himself, and relate these to each other. This ability enables human beings to act, reflect on their actions, and thereafter initiate other actions. Therefore, educators should encourage children to engage in self-reflection by encouraging self-activity.

It is difficult to determine how much influence those theories of general education, or other theories, may have had on educational policies and practices. Sketching their political and practical history and situation might look like this:

1. The 1958 Parliamentary Report on the *Folkeskole*¹ – that is, the Danish Ministry's Guide to Education at Schools – was discussed and adjusted extensively at the municipal level, which involved politicians, educational professionals, students,

¹The Danish primary and secondary school, from kindergarten through year 9/10.

and local communities. For many years, the chain of governance went from state to municipality to school. The teachers' union was very influential at all levels until 2013.

2. The Act on the Basic School expressed the political intentions in Article 1 ("Act on Folkeskole 1993," 2000), which states:

The school shall prepare the students for active participation, joint responsibility, rights, and duties in a society based on freedom and democracy. The teaching of the school and its daily life must therefore build on intellectual freedom, equality, and democracy. (Author's translation)

Ironically, this declaration of democracy in education was issued at the beginning of the new, neoliberal outcome discourse era. But that discourse did not emerge until years later.

3. Ministries of education shared influence over schools with local authorities as government-issued legislation and allowed local administrations to interpret the overarching legislation when they implemented it (Moos et al., 2016; Moos & Paulsen, 2014). Until the beginning of the millennium, there was only a national test when school was completed in years 9 or 10.
4. Mainstream educational practices were enacted by governance systems, each of which had two sections: a professional-administrative one and an elected body like government and parliament, city administration and city council, school leadership, and school board, and leadership and teacher council. The act described a student council.
5. The educational governance supported a general practice of permitting teacher discretion in interpreting national aims, student motivation and abilities, and the choice of teaching methods and learning material.
6. Learning material was produced by private companies and had to be approved by the school board (individual boards for each school).

The governance discourse developed by the welfare model advocates democratic equality and deliberation in society and its institutions, and it builds on individual authority and democratic participation and deliberation for democratic Bildung.

Governing the Neoliberal State

The economy is the fundamental framework of contemporary states and transnational agencies. One effect of this is that, over the past 30–40 years, many Western nations have transitioned from being primarily welfare states to being competitive states (Pedersen, 2010).

In the years following World War II (WWII), we saw the emergence of welfare states, where areas of civil society were taken over by the state, which would protect citizens and thus further social justice, political equity, and economic equality. Full employment was a major goal, and the public sector was seen primarily as

delivering services to citizens; for example, citizens were supported if they became unemployed or ill.

Transnational agencies such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the European Commission (EC) – to mention only a few – have been driving forces behind the opening of national economies to global marketplace logic and competition since the 1970s, and their power has been increasing since the mid-1990s. Their economic aims shifted from growth through full employment and increased productivity through the labour force and technology to growth through international trade and investment.

Beginning in the 1970s, governments started to turn economics in a neoliberal direction built on a rational choice ideology, increasing market influence and minimizing state influence (e.g., deregulation, privatisation, outsourcing) (Moos, 2014). Citizens are seen less as citizens in a political democracy and more as part of the labour force, fully responsible for their circumstances, and as consumers. The public sector is seen primarily as serving production and trade in the national economic system.

Neoliberal states develop new forms of governance and new technologies of governance (Peters et al., 2000), that rely heavily on the market as the logical basis for public policy and that involve the devolution of management from the state to the local level, to local institutions (in the case of education, to self-managing or private schools), to classrooms (classroom management techniques), and to individuals (self-managing students). Foucault called this kind of network managing, meta-management combined with self-steering, neoliberal governmentalisation (Foucault, 1991): governance presupposes management agencies, but it also requires and gains the cooperation of the subjects involved. According to Foucault, this is the case in every modern society. What makes a difference is the logic or rationale that seems to govern the fields:

No longer are citizens presumed to be members of a political community, which it is the business of a particular form of governance to express. The old and presumed shared political process of the social contract disappears in favor of a disaggregated and individualised relationship to governance. (Peters et al., 2000)

The Second Discourse

Following World War II, educational policies moved from a *democratic bildung* discourse to an *outcome-based discourse*, where the purpose of schooling, Democratic Bildung, was *forgotten* and replaced by measurable educational aims. Democratic and sense-making leadership were replaced by top-down economic management. Thus, fundamental aspects of education were changed from educational purpose to measurable aims, leadership in relationships was replaced by charismatic individual management, and belief in the core values of trust and responsibility was replaced by control and accountability.

The outcome-based discourse is attached to the competitive state that emerged from neoliberal, free-market economics and is called the ‘outcome-based discourse’ (Moos, 2017a) because it identifies the fundamental outcomes of education as the measurable outcomes of student learning. In this discussion of education, there is a tendency to homogenise educational practices, for example, by advocating for general education in a globalised world. Many aspects of the outcomes-based discourse were developed over time, and a coherent version of that discourse was seen in the Danish School Reform of 2013 (Moos, 2016).

The act from 2013 and subsequent regulations stated that the primary and secondary school should be a ‘learning outcomes managed school’, with more than 3000 national goals that would fall under four main categories: learning objectives, competencies, skills, and knowledge (Undervisningsministeriet, 2015). The number of national tests was increased to 42, 14 of which were compulsory from 2013 onward.

The outcomes-related aspect of Danish school reform was argued for based on the national test results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which policymakers claimed were too low. That parameter was used as the benchmark for a school’s success. A successful school has results that place it among those of the top five nations in the PISA league table. Policymakers and educational scholars claimed that traditionally, too much teaching was based on unclear and unfounded hunches, and that could not continue. Therefore, education needed to be reformed from the bottom up. Teaching should be based on knowledge of what works with respect to national goals. That meant it should be evidence-based. Initially, this idea came from an OECD report on quality in the Danish educational system, the Peter Mortimore review (OECD, 2004b), and the review of Danish educational research (OECD, 2004a). The main recommendations in these reports were to strengthen the culture of evaluation because institutions and agencies should be held accountable for their outcomes and to focus more on evidence in education because goals should be based more on concrete, generic knowledge (Moos & Krejsler, 2021).

Very often, the curriculum that is developed in this situation has a scientific structure: experts know how to attain their (often political) ends, and they describe in detail every step that schools, teachers, and students must follow. In this orientation, there is a focus on going ‘back to the basics’ and ‘back to the skills’, because these are what may easily be measured.

The vision of education in an outcomes-based state is built on two core theories: management by objectives and outcomes-based accountability. Proponents of the outcomes-based discourse often refer to parallel theories, such as scientific management and the scientific curriculum, as their core theoretical bases (Blossing et al., 2013). Proponents of these theories are fundamentally concerned with effective and efficient governance and, thus, with centralised power. Also, the scientific curriculum hides the power to determine the purpose, content, relationships, and methods of education under the pretexts of expertise and value-free decisions.

The Danish Government passed a legislative act, Act 409, which fundamentally changed the teachers’ relationships to school principals, municipalities, and

authorities (Regeringen, 2013). The act states that school principals must determine the teachers' workloads and the scope of their work (subject and class). Until this act was enacted, this process had been negotiated between teachers and representatives of teachers' unions, and school principals and employers.

The outcomes-based discourse and its associated practices are subject to more national social technologies than we have ever seen before in the history of education and educational theory. Social technologies may be seen as silent carriers of power. They are made for a purpose – often hidden from the practitioners – and also specify ways of acting. Therefore, they indicate a non-deliberative practice that is steered and managed from the top down (Dean, 1999).

The Contract and Social Technologies

In Denmark, a very important tool of the public (and therefore also educational) governance is the social contract (Andersen, 2003; Bovbjerg et al., 2011; Moos & Krejler, 2021). Over the past 30 years, specific contracts have been developed for public governance and organisational leadership and management. The inspiration for this came from the (OECD, 2016). The contracts are part of public governance and thus part of the relationships between governments and organisations, consultancies, institutions, and individuals. They are not legally defined as symmetrical contracts; they are governance contracts and therefore special in that the superior level defines the framework of resources, the values, and the indicators, whereas those at the acting level sign the contract and thereby indicate that they intend to comply with and implement the expectations and indicators.

An example of an individual, social tool that is compulsory for all teachers is the 'student plan'. Each teacher must collaborate with each student to devise a plan that addresses individual academic and social goals, the stage of learning or progress, and the actions that need to be taken every year, from kindergarten through the 9th year. The contracts are developed in ways that further their governance aspect and also make use of many social technologies. Digitalisation is part of this and will be discussed below.

There are distinctive forms of Danish governance contracts, like vertical, top-down contracts between political-administrative principals and local and institutional agents. They encourage actors to compete for contracts both within the public administration and with external private enterprises or consulting firms. There are also horizontal contracts within agencies or authorities. The agency is divided into departments that compete with each other and external actors for contracts.

One kind of contract is written in such detail that it is necessary to use social technologies such as international and national comparisons or governance packages (manuals or planning prescriptions). Another kind of contract is softer and thus leaves decisions regarding implementation to the practitioners, as long as they stay within the general framework. In most cases, a degree of self-evaluation is built into the contract. Such contracts leave decisions to the practice level, where people must

manage themselves and their work. This type of leadership through values means that organisations and individuals must take over the values and norms laid out by the superior level (Andersen, 2003).

Contract governance is essentially a model for separating goal setting from production and measuring results. For those purposes, there is a need for clear and measurable goals/standards and reliable measurements of results/outcomes.

The neoliberal model of governance has been characterised by diverse combinations of social technologies that may be divided into three themes (Dunleavy et al., 2005). First, there is the *disintegration* of public sectors into semi-autonomous units at several levels – national, regional, local, and institutional. Next, at each level, there are also initiatives that involve private companies and consultancies that enter the broad *competition for contracts*. This means that relations between areas are guided by competition among providers, and by contracts between levels (OECD, 2016); this is followed by *incentivisation*, which offers pecuniary rewards based on performance. Contracts are often negotiated and managed based on a Management by Objectives or a Management by Results (MBO/MBR) model.

Contracts may be seen as opportunities to import benchmarks, social technologies, and specific procedures into the governance process: *Objectives and outcomes* are clearly described and detailed by the contractor, who often refers to standards and scores in international assessments such as the PISA test, both as an objective and a benchmark. Thus social technologies support the global standardisation and homogenisation of education (Moos & Wubbels, 2018). Another feature of contracts is *what works*: When describing objectives and outcomes, references are frequently made to ‘what works’ or ‘best practice’, evidence-based programs, or procedures. This designation, the concept of evidence, is becoming *the* generic expression of concrete and best knowledge everywhere, and in all contexts (Krejsler & Moos, 2021). A general aspect of the contracts is that *numbers* are used more often than before, and Danish policymakers argue for the need to comply with global or international standards or best practices in education. One reason for this is that the results of this kind of comparison are given in *numbers*, and numbers are often regarded as precise, accurate, and full of relevant information. Numbers are thought to cross the lines between the fluffy and imprecise field of education and the objective field of the natural sciences (Nóvoa, 2013).

Contracts are suitable for expanding the group of actors involved in education. One way to do that is through *educational programs*: individuals, associations and consultancy firms develop and offer best-practice packages internationally, and with generic, international arguments. *Privatisation* is another option for governments to choose. In most cases, a contractor can make open bidding optional for public and private agencies or institutions. This model has been adopted for governing free, primary and lower secondary schools, high schools, university colleges, and universities. *Consultancies*: National and international, private, or *philanthropic* consultancy firms are increasingly finding their way into educational governance (also see the section on “*Digitalisation*”).

Generally, the logic of *neoliberal development* applies to contracts. The development of numerous contracts is built on neoliberal market logic. Thus, education is

seen as a commodity that is produced by producers: teachers and schools. The services/goods are delivered to consumers (students/parents) once the provider wins the tender. Today, this perspective is being challenged by the intrusion of high-tech, digital algorithms, and the like. In Sect. “[Digitalisation](#)” of this text, we shall discuss that development and its opportunities for, and threats to education.

Discourse on Democracy: Organising and Relations

Important aspects of the Democratic Bildung discourse are thought to be enacted in a school’s practices. Thus, the practices become a pivotal part of the discourse, as Ball et al. (2012) discuss under the theme: of how schools enact policies. However, enacting policies is only one aspect of practices, because cultural influences, theories and so on also have an effect. That means that the school as an organisation, the professional actors, and the students, live the discourse. These short discussions of school organisation and their actors are intended to show the connections between external influences and the internal life of a school: organisation, professionals, and students.

Biesta (2003) describes democratic education (Moos, 2014) as ‘*creating opportunities for action, for being a subject, both in schools and other educational institutions, and in society as a whole*’. Besides the opportunities for action or participation, the most important concepts related to democracy are criticism and diversity, because they give a more precise direction to the concept of participatory and deliberative democracy. In line with this understanding, Beane and Apple et al. (page 7) (Furman & Starrat, 2002; Woods, 2005) describe the central concerns of democratic schools as:

1. The open flow of ideas that enables people to be as fully informed as possible
2. The use of critical reflection and analysis to evaluate ideas, problems, and policies
3. The welfare of others and the common good
4. Concern for the dignity and rights of individuals and minorities

Pursuing this kind of goal has been a major concern for many educationalists over time. Some of them are (Beane & Apple, 1999; Bernstein, 2000; Biesta, 2003; Dewey, 1916/2005) who state that it is crucial to give students a voice and that this is an opportunity for deliberation at schools. This builds on an idea of a deliberative democracy that attempts to build a connection between liberal and communitarian democracy (Louis, 2003). The basis of liberal democracy is described as a special form of governance, where the free individual is capable of choosing for him- or herself, and where this individual pursues his or her own interests, and so takes care of his or her own life. The education practice takes place at schools, which are often seen as a set of structures. Karl Weick argues that our perspective of organisations needs to change to that of organising: the fixed structures and bricks are not what is important; what is important is to remember that organising is about communication:

When we say that meanings materialize, we mean that sensemaking is, importantly, an issue of language, talk, and communication. Situations, organizations, and environments are talked into existence. (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409)

School leadership may mean very different things. If one takes the Democratic Bildung Discourse as one's point of departure, school leadership means empowering professionals and students to learn as much as possible, and to develop non-affirmative, critical, and creative interpretative and negotiation skills when doing so. It would also mean that professionals are encouraged and given the opportunity to collaborate with other professionals. Theories of transformational and distributed leadership are often used to explain and develop schools and leadership. Gary Yukl (2008) focuses on communicative and sense-making processes when developing a shared vision for schools, and Jim Spillane and his colleagues (2001) develop the concept of distributed leadership, leadership distributed over a number of people who contribute to the development of schools and education in more or less symmetrical relationships (Moos, 2020). On the other hand, the Learning Outcomes Discourse focuses on the correct and effective implementation of goals set at the national level, and on national testing and the international level of PISA comparisons. Education science experts have described the correct answers to their own questions with the expectation that teachers and students will work to implement these affirmations. School principals are then expected to develop the school's direction based on data from testing and on evidence-based practices (OECD, 2008). Teachers are expected to deliver services to students, who very often work individually (Moos, 2017b).

Digitalisation

The OECD has promoted digitalisation in education for over 30 years (OECD, 1995), and many governments have taken them up on it by promoting the development and dissemination of learning platforms constructed and sold by for-profit companies, often global companies such as Microsoft or Google (e.g. itslearning,² Meebook, StudentIntra, Aula). This is an aspect of the emergence of *eduBusiness* (Williamson, 2017). This *eduBusiness* discourse and practice are built on two foundations. The first is the commodification of education that positions education at the center of the global marketplace (Ball, 2004, 2012), and the second is the rather new interest in education that is being taken by international and national private agencies, such as large consultancies and private foundations. Here, the players are interested in profits and the influence they may acquire from accumulated data, and in the global education market.

²<https://itslearning.com/dk/> – <https://meebook.com/> – <https://aulainfo.dk/> – https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.itslearning.sistudents&hl=en_IE

Global education programs such as PALS (Positive behaviour in learning and interaction) or STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) are examples of this kind of education ‘package’. The corporate world was extremely interested in turning the school curriculum more toward technical subjects. Representatives from the Confederation of Danish Industry were massively influential in the preparation of legislation and research projects on this subject (Schmidt, 2019).

Learning platforms are a major general tool for high-tech companies, and they are also a preferred social technology of the Danish government (Denmark, 2015). They are constructed to use and harvest big data. The use of algorithms to produce mega-/big databases from globally-administered tests and learning programs (Williamson, 2016) helps companies to claim that their programs are evidence-based. Thus, they support downgrading or neglecting the importance of national and local cultures while they achieve ‘algorithmic governance’ of citizens’ everyday lives (Williamson, 2017) by combining thinking, institutions, technologies, and activities that may be used to monitor, control, form and regulate human activity and behaviour (Foucault, 2001; Grimaldi & Ball, 2020).

Another step in the eduBusiness development emerged in 2019 when municipalities began to collaborate with Google Suite for Education (Council, 2019). Google has negotiated low prices for various laptop models, for which the programming and storage facilities are the Google Cloud. Cloud facilities are being offered to municipalities free of charge. Thus, for example, they may give free laptops to all students in all schools in the Municipality of Aarhus. Google does not earn anything, money-wise, but gathers a lot of big data on students and learning in the district, and perhaps also the persistent loyalty of their ‘customers’ (Williamson & Hogan, 2020). The municipal authorities have not yet found this arrangement problematic (Interview with Lucas Lundbye Cone in *Jyllands Posten*, November 8th, 2019).

The Aula platform – a Danish learning platform, launched by the Ministry of Children and Education (Agency, 2021) – is seen as a complete universe or environment that encompasses all aspects of students’ and teachers’ school life, from learning to well-being and forgotten outdoor activities (Cone, 2020 (forthcoming)). This brings standardising, monitoring, controlling, and surveillance (Zuboff, 2020) of actors to a new, higher level because standards and practices are being determined at a general, national level. One aspect of this is the isolation of education: students work individually on the internet to find the correct answers to general questions, given to all students. Assignments are technical and build on behaviouristic concepts of stimulus and response. Teachers are supposed to act as technical assistants, not as educationalists. Huge tech companies are moving from eduBusiness to *learningBusiness*.

Digitalisation is a two-headed – at least – creature: threatening, as it takes away our freedom of choice and establishes mass surveillance and affirmative education. On the other hand, it facilitates our relations with the world and works in the global community of marketplaces.

Past, Present, and Future?

One of the challenges of educational theory and practices, whether it concerns general educational theory or the scientific curriculum, or the online education platform industry, is finding ways to decide how to bring data, information, or knowledge from the world outside schools and education, inside, to be used as instructional material by teachers and learning sources by pupils. This is a real challenge because the total sum of knowledge in the world is extremely vast and absolutely impossible for any one student to acquire. This challenge has been discussed for ages, and Dietrich Benner also addresses it (2021). He discusses the basic constitutive concepts of individual education. The first is the concept of *Bildsamkeit*, flexibility, and the second is the transformation of societal influences and requirements:

The second constitutive concept of education, i.e., education as a summons to free self-activity, must also be connected to the social aspect of education processes. The non-hierarchical order of societal forms of practice, as the fourth basic principle, corresponds to the need to transform societal interests in education into pedagogical categories. Thus, everything that children are expected to learn in educational settings must be pedagogically transformed in such a way that the learner can acquire it in a way that simultaneously expands experience, supports forming capacity to judge, is reflective, participatory, and help shape opinions in terms of reflected will. (Benner, 2021)

Benner finds that everything that children are expected to learn must be pedagogically transformed in such a way that students can internalise it. Wolfgang Klafki also considered this very important. He discussed the prevailing principles of formal and material *Bildung*, focusing on ‘learning to learn’ or ‘learning subjects, and found that both were insufficient and therefore advocated the concept of categorical education, learning through examples (Klafki, 2001).

Researchers who study the scientific curriculum focus on three directions (Blossing et al., 2013): on curriculum objectives based on Franklin Bobbitt’s ideas (1924), on learning outcomes based on Benjamin Bloom’s (1956) ideas of taxonomy or on Ralph Tyler’s concept of technological means–end model (Tyler, 1949).

With the possible exception of Wolfgang Klafki’s categorical didactics, the foregoing concepts build on the understanding that scientists or professionals were able to identify and choose appropriate knowledge and structures for education at schools. Bear in mind that for ages, schools have been regarded as the institutions where, for the first time, children and youth are presented with, and given the opportunity to work on important knowledge. Here they could acquire the knowledge, they could not accumulate outside of school in everyday life. In parallel with the changes in a social situation, teachers h. They used to be teachers in small villages where parents were less educated as teachers and thus regarded them as sources of knowledge. Today, many parents of children in mainstream schools are as well-educated, or even better educated than the teachers, so the teachers may no longer lay claim to intellectual superiority.

In many ways, children and youth are now in the same situation as their parents were: they are in touch with much of the contemporary world through various

services and social media, on the internet, radio and blogs, on television or streaming, in books, human relationships in cities. Greta Thunberg demonstrates improving the environment, public discussions of climate change, #MeToo, and other social movements, the new global perspective on the pandemic, and so forth.

Today the streams of information, as well as fake news, are vast and often may leave youngsters with profound difficulty with building an identity or developing helpful social relationships. There are many reasons for this, but one is that social media are not benign. They form people while entertaining or teaching them, through algorithms and social technologies that are in no way innocent: they act for the purpose of something that is mostly hidden from users but still influences them. Actually, social technologies deliver more than they promised when it comes to directions of affirmation of the national system, marketplace, structure, or logic.

School education may need to dig deeper than the didactic surface and broadly reinvent didactic research, thereby teaching and preparing students to live and act in the world, and to understand how it works: the structures and logic ‘that underlie’ things. The Norwegian educationalist Jon Hellesnes stated:

Democratic Bildung means that people are socialised in such a way that they understand the problem complexes pertaining to the preconditions of what occurs around them and to them. Thus, educational socialisation emancipates humans to be political actors. (Hellesnes, 1976) (My translation)

Hellesnes described a vision of education consistent with the Outcomes-based Discourse:

Affirmative education reduces humans to objects of political processes that they do not recognise as political; a conditioned human being is more an object for direction and control than a thinking and acting subject. (Hellesnes, 1976) (My translation)

Hellesnes’ description should be a profound reminder of the need for democracy in education, especially in this digital era.

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Chapter 14

On the Normativity of Data-Driven Curriculum Policy-Making: A Discursive and Non-affirmative Approach



Andreas Nordin

Abstract This paper raises a critical argument on the normativity of data-driven curriculum policy-making in shaping and reshaping education at all levels along an evaluative rationale. The critique evolves in two steps, the first step is deconstructive in character and draws on the work of Porter (Trust in numbers: The pursuit of objectivity in science and public life. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1995) and research on data-driven education. The second step is reconstructive in character, making use of the non-affirmative theory in education (Benner, On affirmativity and non-affirmativity in the context of theories of education and Bildung. In M. Uljens (Ed.), *Non-affirmative Theory of Education and Bildung*. Springer, 2023; Uljens, *Revista Tempos e Espaços em Educação* 18(9): 121–132, 2016; *Trans Curríc Inquiry* 15(2): 4–25, 2018; Uljens & Ylimaki, *Nord J Stud Educ Policy* 1, 30–43, 2015; *Bridging educational leadership, curriculum theory and didaktik: Non-affirmative theory of education*. Springer, Cham, 2017) to elaborate on a more reflexive position. The critical examination shows how *competitiveness*, *objectivity*, and *distance* operate as educational ideals within the discourse of data-driven curriculum policy-making, narrowing the educational imagination to what can be expressed in league tables and ranking lists and promoting easy answers to complex questions of what works. These ideals are challenged by non-affirmative theory, which proposes a more reflexive approach to curriculum policy-making, emphasising process rather than outcome and questions rather than answers as drivers of such processes.

Keywords Curriculum policy-making · Discursive institutionalism · Non-affirmative theory · Normativity · Numerical data

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M. Uljens (ed.), *Non-affirmative Theory of Education and Bildung*,

Educational Governance Research 20,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30551-1_14

Introduction

In recent years, the production and use of numerical data have become increasingly important in curriculum policy-making. In a globalised and uncertain world, they provide a sense of predictability and calculability longed for by policymakers and practitioners (cf. Gorur, 2015). Numerical data offer an answer to the frequently asked question, ‘What works?’ They seemingly offer a secure place, free from any personal preferences or political ideologies, a place from which objective and disinterested decisions can be made about desirable futures based on quantitative measures. However, since formal education is a teleological practice, ‘a practice framed by a *telos*: an aim or purpose’ (Biesta, 2010, p. 500), the idea of making entirely objective and disinterested decisions about the future seems somewhat incongruous. The critical argument raised in this chapter is that curriculum policy-making based on numerical data is as normative as curriculum policy-making based on any other ideal. Data-driven curriculum policy-making here refers to a general trend among curriculum actors at all levels to increasingly rely on numerical data as a basis for their everyday decision-making (cf. Addey et al. 2017; Nordin, 2019). The different levels of curriculum policymaking referred to in this paper are classroom, curriculum, and societal (Deng & Luke, 2008), where the societal level, due to the transnational turn in curriculum policymaking, includes emerging transnational policy spaces and actors (cf. Anderson-Levitt, 2008; Nordin & Sundberg, 2018; Wahlström & Sundberg, 2017). The critique evolves in two steps in relation to the three levels of policy-making. The first step is deconstructive in character and draws on Porter’s (1995) work on the quantification of the modern democratic state and previous work on data-driven curriculum work in critically examining the constitutive ideas underpinning the discourse on data-driven curriculum work and how they are manifested at different levels of curriculum policy-making. The second step is reconstructive in character, making use of the non-affirmative theory in education (Benner, 2023; Uljens & Ylimaki, 2015, 2017; Uljens, 2016, 2018) to elaborate on a more reflexive position.

Data-Driven Curriculum Policy-Making

The role of and trust in numerical data as part of building the modern bureaucratic and democratic society has been thoroughly examined by Porter (1995), supplemented by science and technology studies (STS) focusing on the co-production of society and how the way we know and represent the world affects the way we choose to live together (cf. Jasanoff, 2004). Furthermore, sociologies of numbers (Woolgar, 1991) and quantification (Espeland & Stevens, 2008) have contributed to the understanding of ‘the relationship among science, numbers, and politics’ (Gorur, 2014, p. 353). In recent years, researchers have also started to relate these processes

of societal quantification to education as a fundamental institution, producing and making use of numerical data for shaping societal futures (e.g. Gorur, 2014, 2015; Williamson, 2017; Lindblad et al., 2018; Mølstad & Pettersson, 2019). Special attention has been given to the role of international organisations (IOs) and the development of international large-scale assessments (ILSAs) in this process of shaping and reshaping the educational sector in general (e.g. Lawn, 2013; Lingard & Sellar, 2016; Meyer & Benavot, 2013; Steiner-Khamsi, 2003) and the way ILSA results are used in national politics for legitimisation and/or delegitimation purposes (e.g. Addey et al., 2017; Alasuutari & Rasimus, 2009; Mølstad et al., 2017; Takayama, 2010). At the curricular level, empirical studies have been done on the implications of the quantification of society for the way schools are governed (e.g., Lewis, 2017; Lingard & Sellar, 2016) and official knowledge is organised in national curriculums (e.g. Mølstad & Karseth, 2016, Mausethagen et al., 2019; Prøitz & Nordin, 2020; Wahlström & Sundberg, 2017). Additional studies have also contributed knowledge on how processes of quantification reach classrooms, standardising and quantifying the everyday interaction among teachers and students (e.g. Au, 2011; Hardy, 2018).

Taken together, these strands of research have contributed widely to our understanding of how the production and use of numerical data have come to shape and reshape curriculum policy-making at different levels. However, still little research has been done focusing the normative ideas underpinning data-driven curriculum policy-making and how they (sometimes implicitly) operate as educational ideals within and between different policy levels. Furthermore, research on the production and use of numerical data in education still does not make use of educational theory to any great extent for a prospective analysis of what alternative educational imaginations are at hand.¹

In making use of the discursive and non-affirmative approach as developed by Uljens and Ylimaki (2015), the analysis in this chapter aims to contribute in both ways. It will critically examine some of the ways in which ideas of *competitiveness*, *objectivity*, and *distance* are discursively constructed and operating as educational ideals within and between different levels of curriculum policy-making, and it will make use of non-affirmative theory in order to elaborate on a more reflexive position from which alternative educational futures can be imagined.

¹Here I would like to point to the research done by the research network *Philosophy and history of the disciplines of education: evaluation and evolution of the criteria for educational research* led by professor Paul Smeyers at Genth University as a promising exception. Of special interest here is the edited volume *Educational Research: The ethics and aesthetics of statistics* published at Springer in 2010 (see Smeyers & Depaepe, 2010).

A Discursive and Non-affirmative Approach

Discourse and Ideas

Making use of a discursive approach means acknowledging that education, above all, is a communicative practice whereby ideas about oneself, others, and society are shaped. Discourse, here understood in a non-idealistic way, is a social practice among others social practices constantly making and remaking the way people think and act. As such, discourse also includes a reflexive element when ‘people constantly generate representations of what they do as part of what they do’ (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 25f). Put differently, people are constantly and simultaneously shaped by, and shaping, the discursive practices of which they are part. Transferred to the context of schooling, this means understanding formal education as composed of two interrelated dimensions, one that involves the reproduction of society and another that involves the transformation of that same society. In order to facilitate such a dialectical approach, Uljens and Ylimaki (2015, p. 39) talk about the formal curriculum as a ‘systematic interruption in the practitioner’s way of understanding herself and carrying out one’s professional tasks’. In this continuously ongoing process of discursive reproduction and transformation of society, Schmidt (2011) has pointed to the important role of ideas, and the substantive content of discourse. She argues that in order to understand institutional continuity (reproduction) and change (transformation), research has to take on a more dynamic view of both continuity and change by ‘concentrating on the substantive ideas developed by ‘sentient agents in discursive interaction that inform their policy-oriented actions, which in turn serve to alter (or maintain) institutions’ (Schmidt, 2011, p. 107). Questions of *what* is said have to be accompanied by questions of *how and by whom* it is said. The neo-institutional branch called *discursive institutionalism* developed by Schmidt (2008, 2010, 2011) distinguishes between three types of ideas, *policy*-, *programmatic*-, and *philosophical ideas*. *Policy ideas*, then, refer to a set of rapidly changing ideas at the surface level operating when ‘windows of opportunity’ (Kingdon, 1984) open. *Programmatic ideas* refer to more general sets of ideas when policy ideas are put into practice in institutional programmes. Such programmes are seen as the result of different actors competing and compromising on different ideas. Here, the role of expert knowledge is of great importance. These ideas are more stable than policy ideas, but still less stable than the third type, *philosophical ideas*, which refer to a deeper core of organising ideas, values, and moral principles. These are ideas that evolve over longer periods of time within the public, academic, and/or political spheres and sometimes operate implicitly as taken-for-granted public philosophies or shared worldviews. A discourse-oriented approach to curriculum policy-making that distinguishes between different ideas thus ‘provides a language for talking about the human interactive and interpersonal dimensions of any level of curriculum policy-making, from classroom to transnational’ (Uljens & Ylimaki, 2015, p. 39) and a critical lens to examine normative ideas operating within and between these different levels.

A Non-affirmative Approach

In addition to deconstructing prevailing discourses on data-driven curriculum policy-making, the critical argument made in this paper holds a reconstructive element. For that purpose, the non-affirmative theory (NAT) formulated by Benner (2023) and further developed by Uljens and Ylimaki (Uljens, 2016, 2018; Uljens & Ylimaki, 2015, 2017) is used. NAT positions itself theoretically as a reflexive approach and criticises both practice-oriented and critical-sociological approaches to curriculum policy-making for being overly normative in presenting ready-made futures. From the reflexive NAT position, practice-oriented approaches are seen as too instrumental, with conservatives missing out on education's wider societal purposes, and critical-sociological approaches are seen as too prescriptive in defining in advance what values and norms should replace the existing ones (Uljens, 2018). Although NAT originated as 'a theory in and for liberal democracy' (Uljens, 2018, p. 11) and therefore itself could be seen as normative, it positions itself as more reflexive than the above-mentioned approaches. Instead of focusing on practical solutions or theoretical replacements decided in advance, NAT sees the role of curriculum policy-making as a means to reflect upon educational ideas and interests and their manifestation within and between different levels of education. Such a reflection could be seen as an invitation to open and democratic deliberation, recognising that different ideals, norms, and values exist but without affirming them. Instead of any content, the ideal or educational aim should be made subject to critical reflection by all parties involved, while simultaneously being open to renegotiating their own positions. This is not to say that affirmation does not occur at any time in educational policy or practice. Rather, it is to say that any kind of affirmation should be accompanied by an element of reflexivity, where the reflexivity, questioning what is taken for granted, is understood as the directional force rather than the affirmation of any given position (cf. Benner, 2023). Curriculum theory then becomes what Pinar (2011) refers to as a 'complicated conversation' to engage in rather than just a provider of ready-made solutions, be they practical or theoretical. This is not to deny the importance of educational research to provide solutions to practical problems, but in a time where the question of 'what works' echoes at all levels of curriculum policy-making, there is also a need for research that problematises, asks questions, and thereby causes problems.

We argue that in addition to enhancing the usefulness of educational research, that is, its capacity for solving problems, there is an ongoing need for research that identifies problems and, in that sense, causes problems. This kind of research challenges taken-for-granted assumptions about what is going on and what should be going on, and speaks back to expectations from policy and practice, not in order to deny such expectations but to engage in an ongoing debate about the legitimacy of such expectations—a debate that crucially should have a public quality and hence should take place in the public domain. (Biesta et al., 2019, p. 1)

To facilitate such an approach, NAT assumes *relative independence* (Uljens, 2016) between education and other social practices. Although acknowledging education as an arena of different actors with a variety of educational agendas and interests, be

they economic, political, statistical, or other, NAT takes on a reflexive position relative to them all. Causing problems here means questioning any taken-for-granted assumption on what value, knowledge, or educational future is of most worth. Instead, any such ideal has to be found in and through communication that recognises all agendas and interests as recognised but does not decide on their directional value in advance. This is not to say that anything goes; instead, it means acknowledging a critical position of relative independence for educational actors at all policy levels.

In this paper, I will make use of three of NAT's core educational concepts for identifying, and thereby causing, problems and challenging some of the normative ideas inherent in data-driven curriculum policy-making: *openness*, *recognition*, and *summons to self-activity*. *Openness* is here understood as both an invitation to communicative participation and as an approach to what is communicated. The openness to participation refers to communicative processes in which individuals develop their subjective uniqueness, as well as their cultural belonging, as pointed out by Uljens (2018, p. 20). In such an interactive practice, 'personalisation and socialisation go hand in hand'. NAT thus acknowledges the dialectical relationship between the social and individual worlds and between the shared and subjective life worlds. But openness also refers to the participants' approach to what is communicated, and here the concept of *recognition* is central. Recognition, with its roots in continental philosophy, on the one hand, recognises any participant as being radically free from the start. This is recognising the freedom of the other as a prerequisite for participation. In this sense, freedom involves the way participants are positioned and approached within any communicative practice. On the other hand, recognition also refers to recognising freedom as a result (of educational activities). Uljens (2018, p. 14) has talked about this as 'The modern pedagogical paradox of freedom as a necessary assumption making education possible, and education as a necessary activity for making (cultural) freedom a possible consequence'. In this chapter, the use of the term *freedom* is limited to a general understanding of freedom as central to education, both as a prerequisite for establishing equal communicative relationships and as a result that needs to be actively maintained and developed within educational activities. The last concept used in this paper is a *summons to self-activity*, which refers to personal engagement in communicative educational practices. It is an invitation for equal participants to take part in communicative educational activities, which hold the potential for them to transcend their knowledge about themselves, others, and the world.

The non-affirmative approach in this paper is thus limited to the use of these concepts in order to identify problems and widen the educational imagination of what curriculum policy-making could entail.

Normative Ideas in Data-Driven Curriculum Policy-Making

In the following, I will give some examples of how the ideas of *competitiveness*, *objectivity*, and *distance* operate as educational ideals in relation to the societal, curriculum, and classroom levels of curriculum policy-making. The examples given below are chosen selectively in line with the purpose of the paper, which is to raise a critical argument on the normativity of data-driven curriculum policy-making.

Objective Data for Comparing Educational Progress at the Societal Level

Data and data infrastructures have become constitutive elements in governing school systems. Lawn (2013) has referred to this phenomenon as emergent ‘systemless systems’ built around the production and use of numerical data. As pointed out, this is a development to a large extent driven by international organisations (IOs) such as the Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievements (IEA) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), followed by others (e.g. Lawn, 2013; Lingard & Sellar, 2016; Meyer & Benavot, 2013; Nordin & Sundberg, 2014; Tröhler, 2014). In this section, I will point towards two fundamental ideas underpinning these ‘systemless systems’. The first one is the idea of competitiveness. Here, Tröhler (2014) has shown the importance of the crisis in the US caused by the launch of the Soviet satellite Sputnik in 1957. Although part of a complex historical web, this event is important in understanding an increased sense of transnational competition at the societal level that also affects education. Having lost the space race to the Soviet Union, politicians in the US called for the standardisation, centralisation and scientification of the educational system in order to reclaim international superiority. Tröhler (2014, p. 33) has described this as the Cold War becoming ‘thoroughly educationalised’. Education came to be understood as being built into an already existing conflict, positioning countries *against* one another on a competitive rationale. With the founding of the OECD in 1961,² the competitive rationale that emerged from Sputnik was recontextualised and translated within a neoliberal discourse focused on the role of education in developing competitive knowledge-based economies; thus still acknowledging education as a central means for success. Addey et al. (2017) reported on an interview with Andreas Schleicher, OECD Director for Education and Skills, in which Schleicher emphasised the importance for nations to measure the skills of their citizens since they are all drawn into a competition taking place on a global market. In order to

²The OECD had a predecessor in the European Economic Co-operation (1948–1961) which was part of the Marshall plan, a US initiative to help build up post-World War Europe simultaneously promoting liberal democracy and market economy (see Lingard & Sellar, 2013).

relate to others in a competitive environment, one has to measure and rank. Schleicher and Zoido (2016, p. 383) put it this way:

In a globalised world, the yardsticks for public policy in education are no longer national goals or standards alone, but increasingly the performance of the most successful education systems internationally. The example of PISA shows that data can be more influential than administrative control or financial subsidy, through which we traditionally shape education policy and practice.

Significant for both the example of the Sputnik crisis and the rise of a global knowledge-based economy is that education is considered primarily as a means to another end outside itself, be it technological development or improved results on international large-scale assessments. As such, it does not have to answer for any educational ideals of its own, instead, it is the context that decides what is of educational value. However, I would argue that scientific objectivity operates as an educational ideal inherent in the practice of decontextualised comparisons of educational results. Only to the extent that data are made objective are they considered comparable. The idea of competing in education as a means of economic growth and prosperity, therefore, relies heavily on the possibility of producing objective and measurable outcomes.

From a non-affirmative position, a fundamental problem here lies in the one-sided focus on thinking of education in terms of comparisons visualised through ranking lists and league tables. Countries are positioned against each other as competitors in hierarchical relationships rather than as collaborators. Some countries are identified as role models, while others are made subject to extensive reforms in light of the best-performing countries in the world. As described by Schleicher and Zoido (2016, p. 375), 'International comparisons can show what is possible in education, in terms of the quality, equity, and efficiency of the educational services achieved by the world's top-performing educational systems...'. Thinking of what is possible in education thus boils down to the whole world looking at about a handful of countries. The imagination asked for by Schleicher and Zoido is therefore a narrow one, where ideas of competition and objectivity are taken for granted when calling upon the world to use its educational imagination. From a non-affirmative position, I would argue that this is quite the opposite of a widened imagination of what is possible in education; such a widened imagination can take place only where educational institutions and their actors are acknowledged a priori as relative independents relative to any other agenda, be it technological or economical. Positioning nations in a hierarchical relationship may enhance competition, but if extending imagination beyond such an approach is desired, a more radical openness has to be adopted. Following the non-affirmative rationale, the answer to what is of educational (and societal) value can never be decided in advance, instead, it is a question continuously seeking its answer in the ongoing complicated conversation (cf. Pinar, 2011). From a non-affirmative position, such a conversation transcends a scientific discourse occupied with categorical issues of right or wrong, true or false, or objective or subjective. The radicality of the non-affirmative education theory instead lies in its approach—any issue has to be made subject to profound communicative

interaction among actors already positioned as free, while simultaneously searching for a widened freedom through open communication.

Standardised Classrooms at the Curriculum Level

Although to a lesser extent spelled out, the production and use of numerical data also frame what is possible to think and do at the curriculum level. As expressed by the OECD in the strategy document *Education 2030*, curriculum work, globally, is supposed to adhere to a transnational discourse in which education is seen as a means in a battle for global superiority and in which the production and use of scientific (statistical) knowledge have made this race possible.

In the face of an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world, education can make the difference as to whether people embrace the challenges they are confronted with or whether they are defeated by them. And in an era characterised by a new explosion of scientific knowledge and a growing array of complex societal problems, it is appropriate that curricula continue to evolve, perhaps in radical ways. (OECD, 2018, p. 3)

However, as shown, by the radicality of curriculum development, framed by a strong normative discourse emphasising comparability between countries, municipalities, and schools and prescribing in advance what knowledge content is of most worth, the educational imagination instead runs the risk of being radically reduced (Au, 2011; Nordin, 2019; Sivesind, 2014). With reference to the US, Au (2011, p. 30) shows that ‘in the case of high-stakes testing in the US, as the content of the curriculum moves to match what the tests require, the structure of curricular content knowledge similarly shifts towards the fragmentation demanded by the test’. Although the OECD calls for radical curriculum development, it thus seems as if what is possible to imagine is predetermined by the ideas of competition and objectivity operating at the societal level and communicated in a variety of ranking lists and league tables. In a study of the 2011 curriculum reform for the Swedish compulsory school, Sundberg (2018) has identified a similar development. He shows how transnational as well as national political demands for comparability have led to an increased focus on developing a standards-based curriculum in Sweden with a close alignment between goals, content, results, and assessments. Among other things, the result also shows how this has led to a decreased local space for teachers to act as co-constructors of curriculum, positioning them as implementers of ready-made standards to be managed in the classroom. Furthermore, the results confirm what Au (2011) found in the case of the US; what is to be assessed determines what is being taught. ‘A normative pressure for the summative assessment of teachers and their teaching is prevalent in the wake of the standards-based curriculum. One teacher expressed it with candour: ‘Well, everything we do must be measurable’ (Sundberg, 2018, p. 127). Although touching briefly upon the results from the two studies, they seem to strengthen the hypothesis that a focus on objectivity and comparisons at the societal level also strongly frames what is possible at the curriculum level, where

facilitating measurability holds an almost hegemonic position ‘reducing the richer, deeper meaningful learning into measurable outcomes’ (Sundberg, 2018, p. 129).

At a basic level, it seems as if openness, both as a prerequisite and a goal, becomes heavily reduced when framed within a discourse of measurability. As shown in the Swedish study, standardised classrooms also mean a reduction of teachers’ professional space, allowing for different forms of knowledge and experiences to inform their professional decision-making. From a non-affirmative position, standardising classrooms is problematic when done to make teaching and learning more effective and their outcomes decontextualised and comparable. Instead of promoting openness and qualified self-activity, it could be seen as an expression of what Au (2011) has talked about as a second wave of Taylorism.

The decontextualization, objectification, and subsequent quantification of students through standardised testing do not stand alone, however. These interrelated processes also make high-stakes, standardised testing an ideal tool for the New Taylorism because turning students (and, by extension, teachers and teaching) into decontextualized, numerical objects also frames students as products and places education firmly within the paradigm of factory production. (Au, 2011, 38)

Drawing on Au, the argument of the OECD (2018) in Education 2030 becomes problematic, advocating a one-size-fits-all solution for all countries as well as for every individual in order to not be defeated by the challenges posed to them by an increasingly complex and uncertain world. Offering one tool for every situation in a complex environment seems extremely risky. In such a position, opening up for a shared discussion on what alternative educational scenarios are possible and what different kinds of tools could be used for different purposes, then, offers a radically different approach. Adopting a non-affirmative position here could then be described as a form of communicative ‘destandardisation’, complicating the conversation and questioning presumptions instead of mechanistically standardising education in a factory-like manner.

Digitising Human Interaction at the Classroom Level

The ideals operating at the above-mentioned levels of curriculum policy-making also relate to the way teachers and students interact at the classroom level. Using Sweden as an empirical example, there has been an ongoing debate for decades about how to improve the equivalence of the Swedish school, a debate that is increasingly becoming part of the discourse of the standardised classroom, facilitating decontextualised comparisons. The need to equalise the selection, organisation, and assessment of subject content in order to minimise national differences has, during the last decade, led to initiatives such as a new curriculum explicitly aimed at minimising the space for teachers to interpret differently and the National Agency for Education producing supplementary material to help teachers plan, teach, and

assess the curriculum in a more coherent way, initiatives taken to standardise every aspect of the classroom. A recent initiative in this pursuit of national equivalence is the experimentation with the digitisation of national tests (National Agency for Education, 2019), which were first tested in about 100 schools and are scheduled for full implementation by 2022. Without going deeper into the reform, it is of interest to mention since it strengthens the argument that human interaction is increasingly constructed as a problem within today's discourse on data-driven curriculum policy-making. In order to come to terms with unreliable performance data, the evaluative process has to be cleansed of human interaction and contextual information that lead to biased judgements. Distance between teachers and students thus operates as a normative idea underpinning this striving for equivalence (cf. Nordin, 2018). Furthermore, it reduces the way assessment is perceived as an integral part of teachers' professional and specialised knowledge (e.g. Lasky, 2005). The pursuit of measurability redefines the role of teachers and students and their professional relationship, replacing closeness with distance, interest with disinterest, and reducing complex educational actors to assessable entities. Taking on a non-affirmative approach, such a reduction deprives teachers of their capability to critically examine the contextual circumstances leading up to the present position, and thereby their potential to transcend that very position. Instead of recognising them as culturally free, teachers (and students) are locked up in a narrow discourse with numbers as the only language available for communicating educational matters (cf. Nordin, 2018, 2019). However, although locked up in a narrow discourse, NAT reminds us that teachers, as relatively independent educational actors, always hold the power to make any taken-for-granted assumption the object of critical reflection with their colleagues and students. Engaging in an open and reflexive classroom discussion with other teachers and students on the substantive ideas constructing the discourse of data-driven curriculum work could then be seen as an act of taking professional responsibility, offering a communicative way out of mechanically and unreflectively passing on prevailing ideas to the generations to come.

Concluding Remarks

The critical argument made in this chapter is that, despite claims of objectivity and disinterestedness, the constitutive ideas making up the discourse on data-driven curriculum policy-making themselves operate as ideals shaping and reshaping education. Organising curriculum policy-making along an evaluative rationale can therefore by no means be seen as a neutral act; it instead promotes a very specific and narrow perception of what education is or could be. In this paper, I have touched briefly on some of the ideas inherent in the discourse on data-driven curriculum policy-making in order to problematise the way they are operating as such ideals shape education today.

Educational Ideas in Data-Driven Curriculum Work

Recognising the ideas operating in data-driven curriculum policy-making as educational ideals means that they can be critically examined within the context of education theory. Such an examination facilitates a discussion of *what* is reduced and reshaped in data-driven curriculum policy-making and the exploration of alternative imaginaries is possible.

Tracing backwards the production and use of numerical data in education reveals a competitive rationale driving education towards producing objective and comparable outcomes. Education is treated as a means for competition, placing societies, regions, schools, teachers, and students *against* each other in a competitive relationship. Although international organisations and national governments try to repack-age this rationale in terms of mutual learning and sharing of best practices, they do so within the context of competition, which, at the end of the day, results in different kinds of ranking lists and league tables claiming to be telling the truth about your country, your school, and yourself. Although seldom discussed, it seems equally possible that such a competitive approach to education can contribute to the fostering of protectionism and nationalism, sharing some knowledge and experiences while leaving out others in order not to lose competitive advantages. *The idea of competitiveness* operates as a philosophical idea on the societal level, coordinating the discourse about curriculum policy-making among transnational and national policy actors. As a result of this competitive approach to education, the production and use of objectives, and thereby comparable educational outcomes, have become imperative, not just to policy actors and politicians, but also to school administrators, teachers, students, and parents. In some respects, it could be argued that ranking lists and league tables promote an inclusive discourse on education since everyone can participate intuitively without any expert knowledge. Problems arise when such a discourse starts to permeate the mindset of educational actors as telling the whole truth about education, shrinking the educational imagination to questions of what works, and finding the most effective solutions to problems communicated as numbers in ranking lists. Another problem raised by Au (2011), among others, is that assessments never operate in a vacuum; they tend to direct what content is selected and organised in the curriculum and the way teachers teach in order to facilitate such a curriculum. In doing so, *the idea of objectivity* also operates as a normative ideal and an organising principle at the curriculum level. In the pursuit of comparability, objectivity itself thus turns normative, becoming an educational ideal. Using the digitisation of national tests in Sweden as an empirical example, I have furthermore argued that the idea of objectivity also contributes to reshaping the interaction between teachers and students in the classroom. When, for example, teachers contextually informed decision-making is replaced with digital procedures as a basis for assessment and an increased amount of supplementary material for teachers is produced in order to standardise classrooms, teachers' ability to make professional judgements is questioned and their interaction with students reduced to what is prescribed in these standardised materials. *An idea of distance* thus operates

at the classroom level in order to facilitate the objective outcome necessary for decontextualised comparisons (cf. Nordin, 2018).

Examining the discourse of data-driven curriculum policy-making thus reveals several normative ideas only touched upon here. However, acknowledging them as educational ideals opens up for a critical theoretical examination of the ways these ideals actually affect education as an end in itself and not just as a provider of solutions to problems external to education. If this is not done, they will continue to operate implicitly as integral parts of data-driven discourses, searching for ever more refined sets of objective numerical data as the obvious solution to any educational problem without ever having to answer to education theory.

Towards a More Reflexive Position

Examining the discourse of data-driven curriculum policy-making shows that there is no such thing as an objective spot from which disinterested decisions can be made. Curriculum policy-making is always framed by a *telos*. Characteristic for data-driven curriculum policy-making, it seems this *telos* is decided upon primarily by actors and organisations whose main interest lies outside education, be it economic, political or other. This might lead to a problematic situation for educational research if, in order to be perceived as relevant, it places too much focus on *solving* problems external to education, missing out on the critical examination of the ideas underpinning such problems. Following Biesta et al. (2019), I would argue that, under prevailing circumstances, educational research identifying, and thereby *causing*, problems is of equal importance, speaking back to any problem for education to solve.

In this paper, I have turned to NAT in an attempt to make a critical argument, speaking back to the discourse of data-driven curriculum policy-making. NAT offers a reflexive approach to any question of ‘what works?’ stating that neither problems nor solutions can be decided upon in advance, instead they should be made subject to intersubjective communication among participants recognised as equal and free. It is in such an interaction with others (and their otherness), that subjects can develop ‘a personal uniqueness and a cultural belonging, i.e. personalisation and socialisation go hand in hand’ (Uljens, 2018, p. 20), and problems find their solutions. Furthermore, and in sharp contrast to the discourse of data-driven curriculum policy-making, NAT emphasises the importance of questions as drivers of such processes. It is the question, rather than the answer, that invites participants to continued problematisation and reflection and therefore should be the driver of curriculum work at all levels. This must not be mistaken for a relativistic position denying the possibility of any kind of affirmation; rather, it is to say that any kind of affirmation has to be accompanied by an element of reflexivity, also questioning the normative assumption underpinning such an affirmation. In proposing such a reflexive approach to curriculum policy-making, I would argue that NAT offers a rich

starting point for a widened, and most-needed, discussion on what is valuable to education, transcending what can be expressed as numerical data in ranking lists and league tables.

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Chapter 15

Bildung and Twenty-First Century Competences: In Need of Mutual Recognition?



Armend Tahirsylaj

Abstract Internationally, curriculum policy is often shaped through either content-based or competence-based curriculum approaches. Considering these two framings of educational policy discourse and curriculum policy making, this chapter compares and contrasts Bildung and twenty-first century competences as outcome(s) of education by examining the latest OECD and European Union (EU) education frameworks and visions and the latest curriculum reform agendas in the national contexts of Norway and Kosovo. The chapter relies on qualitative document analysis methodologically, and it is theoretically framed by non-affirmative education theory, critical-constructive didaktik and curriculum ideologies. Through a comparative reading of aims of education promoted by the OECD, the EU, Norway, and Kosovo frameworks, it is found that the OECD is recalibrating the education goals towards individual and collective well-being, the EU maintains the focus on mastery of key competences for lifelong learning, Norway promotes its dual mission of schooling towards education and Bildung, and Kosovo aims at mastery of key competences introduced in the latest curriculum reform. It is concluded that a Bildung-oriented curriculum policy could provide for a more holistic view of the individual and human development as it gives more agency to the individuals to shape their lives in their own terms and resume responsibility accordingly.

Keywords Bildung · Competences · Curriculum policy · Norway · Kosovo

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© The Author(s) 2023
M. Uljens (ed.), *Non-affirmative Theory of Education and Bildung*,
Educational Governance Research 20,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30551-1_15

Bildung and Twenty-First Century Competences: An Introduction

Two main narratives have dominated education policy discourse and curriculum policy-making in recent history and development. The first one relies on content-based curricula, and the second focuses on competence-based curricula. The content-based narrative has been more nationally oriented, while the competence-based narrative is globally oriented but makes its way into many national contexts. Influential transnational organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU) through the European Commission (EC), for example, have been the most vocal proponents of competence-based curricula as a response to overcoming and outdoing ‘outdated’ content-based curricula (Tahirsylaj & Sundberg, 2020). At the same time, education is still a hotly debated and contested issue within national contexts, and formally, all decision-making powers regarding education policy, at least in the European context, rest within national boundaries. Considering these two framings of educational policy discourse and policymaking, this chapter compares and contrasts Bildung and twenty-first century competences as the outcome(s) of education by examining the latest OECD and EC education frameworks and visions and the latest curriculum reform agendas in the national contexts of Norway and Kosovo.

While recent literature into the discussion of Bildung and competence¹-based approaches to education has been critical of the latter due to its increased instrumentality of education and towards achieving limited and narrow goals, this chapter takes a different perspective. This chapter intends to open up a discussion pointing towards the possibility that Bildung and twenty-first century competences perhaps rather complement one another to offer relevant educational experiences for students attending formal schooling presently and in the near future. Hence, the main question addressed in the chapter is: What new possibilities could Bildung and twenty-first century competences offer for education policy-making and discourse if they were to mutually recognize the contribution of each towards a democratic, inclusive, and non-affirmative future? The chapter draws on the non-affirmative education theory of Dietrich Benner (Benner, [this volume](#); Uljens, 2015; Uljens & Ylimaki, 2015, 2017), the critical-constructive didaktik of Wolfgang Klafki (Klafki, 1998, 2000), and curriculum ideologies to frame the topic educationally using education-based perspectives for education purposes and goals (Schubert, 2018; Deng & Luke, 2008; Hopmann, 2007).

Methodologically, the chapter uses document analysis as a qualitative research method to meet its aim (Bowen, 2009). The analysis primarily concerns ‘institutional’ (Deng, 2011) or ‘intended’ (van den Akker, 2003) curricula, which focus on

¹Educational scholarship is inconsistent in the use of terms ‘competence’ and ‘competency’, while both terms are used interchangeably (for example, the OECD uses ‘competency’ and ‘competencies’ in its documents, while the EC uses ‘competence’ and ‘competences’; for details, see Tahirsylaj & Sundberg, 2020). This chapter uses ‘competence’ and ‘competences’ throughout.

the relationship between schooling and society, and thus it does not concern the programmatic or classroom-implemented curricula. The chapter, first, provides an outline of Bildung as an outcome(s) of education from the non-affirmative theory of Dietrich Benner ([this volume](#); Uljens & Ylimaki, 2015, 2017) and the critical-constructive didaktik of Wolfgang Klafki (1998, 2000). Second, it provides a summary of twenty-first century competences, as defined from an international perspective through the OECD (OECD, 2018) and the EU (The Council of the European Union, 2018), as well as within national contexts in Norway (The Ministry of Education and Research [MER], 2017), and Kosovo (the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology [MEST], 2016). All these have adopted, in varying degrees, competence-based curricula, which serve as data material.

Recent Bildung and Competence-Oriented Research in Norway and Kosovo

In Norway, and the Scandinavian context more broadly, researchers have been critical of the neo-liberal turn education policy taken since the 1980s because it challenged the traditional Nordic education model rooted in social justice, equity, equal opportunities, inclusion, nation-building, democracy and participation (Imsen et al., 2017). Nordic education policy experienced a shift from the *welfare state values* of equality and participatory democracy towards *competitive state values* of competition and preparedness for the labor market (Imsen et al., 2017). The transnational influences affected sharply the Norwegian education policy reform with the introduction of the Knowledge Promotion Reform of 2006 (MER, 2006), which shifted the focus from inputs to outputs of education around basic skills and learning outcomes (Imsen & Volckmar, 2014). In general, researchers were critical of the shift because of its emphasis on competences and learning outcomes while downplaying content-based curriculum and Bildung ideals (see, for example, Blossing et al., 2014; Mølsted, & Karseth, 2016; Willbergh, 2016; Willbergh, 2015). Recent research has examined the ‘knowledge question’ in the latest curriculum reform in Norway (MER, 2017). It built upon the previously introduced idea of basic skills in 2006 and questions whether powerful knowledge can be developed under competences as a governing category in education (Sundby & Karseth, 2021); however, without discussing the references to Bildung made in the latest Core Curriculum document. In their turn, Bachmann et al. (2021) investigated teachers’ work plans in a Norwegian context. They found that Bildung ideas were more present in subjects such as social sciences, arts, physical education, and religion and less present in subjects that are part of the national testing system, such as mathematics, Norwegian, and English language, which focused more on assessment-oriented descriptions of basic skills instead. These findings reveal the inconvenient truth that the three subjects that are part of the national testing system in Norway also take up most of the teaching time in the school timetable. As such, they have to

prioritize mastery of specific learning outcomes as defined in the curriculum requirements and the assessment frameworks, aiming for better student performance in such national tests, which may or may not contribute to students' *Bildung*. They also indicate that while historically Norway ran an education system built on the *Bildung*-oriented *Didaktik* tradition (Tahirsylaj, 2019a), its latest national assessment practices having shifted it towards the competence-based and social efficiency-oriented ideology of the curriculum education tradition.

In Kosovo, education policy has been largely shaped by international organizations that assisted in rebuilding Kosovo's education system after the war in 1999. Of interest here is the latest curriculum reform of 2011, which took a 'competence-turn' introducing six key competences as main goals of pre-university education, following the EU/EC recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning (Tahirsylaj, 2018, 2021a; Tahirsylaj & Fazliu, 2021). Traditionally, Kosovo's education system followed a *Didaktik*-based model adopted from former Yugoslavia, but the latest education policy reforms have moved the curriculum towards a social efficiency-based education tradition that promotes key competences and external assessments (Tahirsylaj, 2021b). A growing body of recent research has investigated the introduction of competence-based curricula in Kosovo and its various implications for public schooling, such as in citizenship education (Tahirsylaj, 2021a), the shift from content-based to competence-based curricula (Saqipi, 2019a; Tahirsylaj & Fazliu, 2021), critical thinking in curricula in comparison to other European nations (Tahirsylaj & Wahlström, 2019), and teacher education policy (Saqipi, 2019b). The findings reveal the influence that transnational education policies have had on Kosovo's education, which in turn followed 'loud borrowing' as policy adoption to signal Kosovo's aspirations to match its education with European trends (Tahirsylaj, 2021a).

Transnational Tendencies Internationally, key competences and competence-based curricula have generated much attention among researchers; however, policy-wise, most so within the European context (Anderson-Levitt, 2017; Tahirsylaj & Sundberg, 2020). Still, peer-reviewed research is limited, and a lack of consensus on definitions of competences is still persistent (Tahirsylaj & Sundberg, 2020). Despite disagreements, a more generic definition of competence, as found in the OECD and EC documentation, that promotes competence as a mobilization of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to produce competent workers and citizens is most dominant (Anderson-Levitt & Gardinier, 2021; Tahirsylaj & Sundberg, 2020). All four major transnational organizations – the OECD, UNESCO, the World Bank, and the EC – have actively been promoting competence-based approaches in education since the early 2000s (Anderson-Levitt & Gardinier, 2021). However, individual national contexts have adopted competence-based curricula in various ways, with some borrowing more straightforwardly from the EC and the OECD documentation

and others more silently and recontextualizing them to fit with national education traditions.²

Bildung, on the other hand, has seen a growing interest in the academic community in recent years, but similarly to competences, the concept of Bildung suffers from a lack of a broadly agreed and accepted definition. Variations in definitions display the preferential choices of references authors make when bringing Bildung into their writing. However, a few limited examples of the use of Bildung in recent research show that Bildung and Bildung-oriented Didaktik are often offered:

- (a) as an alternative to competence-based curricula (see, for example, Ryen & Jøsok, 2021; Willbergh, 2015),
- (b) as a central concept in Bildung-based Didaktik,
- (c) as an alternative to the perceived ‘curriculum crisis’ and in relation to Michael Young’s concept of powerful knowledge (see, for example, Deng, 2021; Tahirsylaj, 2019b),
- (d) as a contribution towards bridging educational leadership, curriculum studies, and Didaktik (see, for example, Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017); and
- (e) as a concept of exploration through quantitative approaches (see, for example, Tahirsylaj & Werler, 2021).

Next, the chapter offers an overview of Bildung from the perspectives of non-affirmative education theory and Wolfgang Klafki’s Bildung-centred Didaktik, as well as curriculum ideologies, to provide a framing for discussing concepts of competence as found in the OECD and EU/EC documents and national curriculum frameworks of Norway and Kosovo. Thus, the discussion is limited to the main education policy goals aspired by these different framework documents in transnational and national contexts and how those education policy goals may be reframed by embracing a Bildung-oriented perspective.

An Educational Theoretical Framing of Bildung and Twenty-First Century Competences

Scholarly debates on Didaktik and curriculum education traditions over the past 30 years have proved useful in understanding the theoretical underpinnings and epistemological assumptions of the two (Westbury et al., 2000). Comparative perspectives have shown that the central concept of Bildung within the Didaktik tradition and the lack of it within the curriculum tradition is one of the most distinctive differences between the two (Deng & Luke, 2008; Hopmann, 2007; Tahirsylaj et al.,

²See, for example, the Special Issue in *Comparative Education* Volume 57, 2021, Issue 1: Contextualising global flows of competency-based education: Polysemy, hybridity and silences. With Kathryn Anderson-Levitt and Meg Gardinier as guest editors.

2015). The comparative perspective of the two traditions has appeared frequently in recent educational scholarship.³ This section provides only a brief overview of the Bildung-based non-affirmative theory of education, Klafki's Bildung-based critical-constructive Didaktik, and curriculum tradition.

Bildung-based non-affirmative theory of education rests on three core concepts: *recognition*, *summoning to self-activity*, and *Bildsamkeit* (Uljens, 2015; also Benner, [this volume](#); Uljens, [this volume](#)). First, the non-affirmative position is defined in contrast to affirmative approaches to education, where 'Affirmative approaches typically intend to transform given values, while a non-affirmative approach allows for critical discussion on the values lying at the foundation of democratic education' (Uljens, 2015, p. 25). Of interest here is the distinction that Dietrich Benner ([this volume](#)) makes between affirmative and non-affirmative education (in German: *Erziehung und Bildung*), which reveals language limitations as no such distinction can be made straightforwardly in English, but which can be operationalized as an integrated teaching, studying, and learning process (Uljens, [this volume](#)). Returning to the three concepts, *recognition*

[...] refers to how the self is aware of the other as being indeterminate or free (ontological assumption), not only as an awareness of the other's situation or reality (epistemological relation), but also to a moral relation in terms of the self's responsibility for the other's worth, dignity, and inviolability as a person and individual (ethical relation). (Uljens, 2015, p. 28)

In turn, *Bildsamkeit* and *summoning to self-activity* are necessary in the process of being and becoming in the modern world. Here 'Bildsamkeit refers to the individual's own conscious efforts aimed at making sense of the world and his/her experiences, while 'summoning' may be seen as the leader's or the teacher's invitation of the Other to become engaged in a self-transcending process' (Uljens, 2015, p. 28). From the non-affirmative position, the main goals of education must include enabling pupils to participate independently and through self-responsible action in the deliberations on what is to be preserved and what is to be changed in society (Benner, [this volume](#)).

Klafki's Bildung-based critical-constructive Didaktik defines Bildung as a three-dimensional concept aiming at promoting the learner's self-determination, co-determination, and solidarity. Here *self-determination* is primarily about enabling students to make autonomous decisions; *co-determination* is primarily about being collaborative and connecting with others to achieve common goals; and *solidarity* is primarily about being active in reaching out to those in need or underprivileged so that they too have opportunities for self-determination and co-determination and achieve Bildung (Klafki, 1998). Klafki positioned that the concept 'critical' pertains to the interest of knowledge '[...] insofar as this approach to Didaktik is oriented towards the goal of guiding all children and adolescents to greater capacity for

³For an extended discussion, see for example, Hopmann, 2007; Deng & Luke, 2008; Hopmann, 2007; Tahirsylaj, 2019b; Tahirsylaj et al., 2015; Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017; Wermke & Prøitz, 2019; Westbury et al., 2000.

self-determination, co-determination, and solidarity’ (Klafki, 1998, p. 311). In turn, the concept ‘constructive’ refers to the interplay between theory and practice and to allowing for an ongoing reform or reforming practice for humane and democratic schooling. In Klafki’s perspective, Bildung is construed as the capacity for reasonable self-determination, as subject development in the medium of objective-general content, as a relationship between the individual and the general, and as inclusive of a moral, cognitive, aesthetic, and practical dimension (Klafki, 2000). Of interest here is Klafki’s conceptualization of Bildung as inclusive of the cognitive dimension, which also includes a notion of competence as an integrative part of education towards Bildung as a capacity for self-determination, co-determination, and solidarity. Klafki’s critical-constructive Didaktik also posits that the main education aims and contents of Bildung need to be regularly updated through and for each generation, echoing a non-affirmative perspective in which education not only affirms but also leaves the possibilities open for a critical discussion of the educational aims and values of a society. Overall, the Didaktik education tradition features three main elements, including a commitment to Bildung, the educative difference between matter and meaning, and teaching and learning as autonomous activities (Hopmann, 2007).

Within the curriculum education tradition, four main curriculum ideologies, often appearing in varied labelling, have been most dominant over the past century: namely *academic rationalism*, *humanism / learner-centeredness*, *social meliorist/social reconstruction*, and *social efficiency* (see, for example, Deng & Luke, 2008; Kliebard, 2004; Schiro, 2013; Tahirsylaj, 2017). A fifth ideology labelled *postmodern and global anti-imperialist* has been added recently (Schubert, 2018). These curriculum ideologies primarily vary with regard to the goals of education they promote and how they define the subject matter to be covered in formal schooling. To summarize, *academic rationalism* promotes the transmission of disciplinary knowledge as the primary goal, while the subject matter includes the canonical body of disciplinary knowledge and ways of knowing; *humanism*, which promotes the development of individual learners who pursue personal development, self-actualization, innovation, and creativity, while the subject matter is defined as learning activities. *Social reconstruction* promotes the use of education for social reform with an emphasis on socio-cultural contexts rather than on the individual needs of learners while perceiving the subject matter as a learning experience where students are engaged in meaningful learning experiences that might generate internally or externally directed social agency. *Social efficiency* promotes the preparation of future citizens with the requisite skills, knowledge, and capital for economic and social productivity, while the subject matter is defined as practical or instrumental knowledge and skills that possess functional and utilitarian value (Deng & Luke, 2008). Finally, a *Global and global imperialist* perspective mainly contrasts the first four ideologies, challenging the mainstream education goals due to their reliance on primarily Western, white, male education ideals, and calls for abandoning master narratives and allowing for a fair representation of the narratives of all stakeholders in what education ought to include (Schubert, 2018). Out of this set of curriculum ideologies, social efficiency has been the most dominant in shaping education visions and curriculum orientations

in Anglo-American contexts (Tahirsylaj, 2017). This overview of Bildung-based and curriculum-based traditions of education can dissect the main approaches promoted by specific education frameworks either at the transnational or national level when referring to competences as education policy aims.

Bildung and Twenty-First Century Competences in Transnational and National Education Frameworks

What are the main aims of education and competences promoted in transnational and national education frameworks? Is it possible to find references to Bildung in such frameworks? To answer these questions, Table 15.1 summarizes the main aims of education and competences promoted by the latest education frameworks of the OECD (OECD, 2018), the EU/EC (The Council of the European Union, 2018), Norway (MER, 2017), and Kosovo (MEST, 2016) as selected examples.

These four frameworks give *competences* different labels; for example, the OECD refers to them as ‘transformative competences’, the EU/EC and Kosovo as ‘key competences’, and Norway as ‘basic skills’. However, the fact that these competences have become part of educational frameworks primarily since the turn of the century is what makes them twenty-first century competences. The focus here is on the four documents, which serve as policy guidelines that, when or if implemented, ought to shape the educational experiences that students go through in formal schooling, mainly covering pre-university education. In that sense, it is important to clarify to whom these frameworks ‘speak to’.

The OECD document is the most globally oriented, as it was developed in cooperation with the OECD member countries, which mainly represent some of the most developed countries from around the world. The EU/EC document speaks directly to policymakers among the EU member states. The document is developed through the collaboration of the EU member states but also makes references to other documents on competences, such as those of the OECD, Council of Europe, and UNESCO. Understandably, Norway’s and Kosovo’s documents ‘speak to’ national and local policymakers and education developers who are to translate the national frameworks into specific curricula for specific age groups, grades, and school subjects. While Table 15.1 entries are offered here for the purpose of capturing education policy orientations across the four documents reviewed, this chapter elaborates next on the main similarities and differences when examining them from a comparative perspective and how those similarities and differences could be addressed when viewed from the perspectives of Bildung-based and/or curriculum-based education traditions.

A comparative reading of the aims of education promoted by the four frameworks shows that the OECD is recalibrating the education goals towards individual and collective well-being. The EU/EC maintains the focus on mastery of key competences for lifelong learning that were first introduced in 2006. In turn, Norway maintains the emphasis on its dual mission of schooling towards education and Bildung, while Kosovo aims at mastery of key competences introduced in the latest curriculum

Table 15.1 Main aims of education and competences promoted in the latest education frameworks of OECD, EU/EC, Norway, and Kosovo

	Main aims of education	Main competences
OECD	<p>Individual and collective well-being through competence development Education has a vital role to play in developing the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that enable people to contribute to and benefit from an inclusive and sustainable future. Education needs to aim to do more than prepare young people for the world of work; it needs to equip students with the skills they need to become active, responsible and engaged citizens.</p>	<p>Three Transformative Competences</p> <p>1. Creating new value: New sources of growth are urgently needed to achieve stronger, more inclusive and more sustainable development; To prepare for 2030, people should be able to think creatively, develop new products and services, new jobs, new processes and methods, new ways of thinking and living, new enterprises, new sectors, new business models and new social models.</p> <p>2. Reconciling tensions and dilemmas: In a world characterized by inequities, the imperative to reconcile diverse perspectives and interests, in local settings with sometimes global implications, will require young people to become adept at handling tensions, dilemmas and trade-offs, for example, balancing equity and freedom, autonomy and community, innovation and continuity, and efficiency and the democratic process.</p> <p>3. Taking responsibility: Equally, creativity and problem-solving require the capacity to consider the future consequences of one's actions, to evaluate risk and reward, and to accept accountability for the products of one's work. This suggests a sense of responsibility, and moral and intellectual maturity, with which a person can reflect upon and evaluate his or her actions [...]</p>

(continued)

Table 15.1 (continued)

EU/EC	Main aims of education	Main competences
<p>Key competences for lifelong learning</p> <p>In a rapidly changing and highly interconnected world, each person will need a wide range of skills and competences and to develop them continually throughout life. The key competences, as defined in this <i>Reference Framework</i>, aim to lay the foundation for achieving more equal and more democratic societies. They respond to the need for inclusive and sustainable growth, social cohesion and further development of the democratic culture.</p>	<p>Eight key competences</p> <p>1. Literacy competence: [...] ability to communicate and connect effectively with others, in an appropriate and creative way. [...] in the mother tongue, the language of schooling and/or the official language in a country or region.</p> <p>2. Multilingual competence: [...] the ability to use different languages appropriately and effectively for communication.</p> <p>3. Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering: (a) [...] the ability to develop and apply mathematical thinking and insight in order to solve a range of problems in everyday situations; (b) [...] the ability and willingness to explain the natural world by making use of the body of knowledge and methodology employed, including observation and experimentation, in order to identify questions and to draw evidence-based conclusions.</p> <p>4. Digital competence: [...] involves the confident, critical and responsible use of, and engagement with, digital technologies for learning, at work, and for participation in society.</p> <p>5. Personal, social and learning to learn competence: [...] the ability to cope with uncertainty and complexity, learn to learn, support one's physical and emotional wellbeing, to maintain physical and mental health, and to be able to lead a health-conscious, future-oriented life, empathize and manage conflict in an inclusive and supportive context.</p> <p>6. Citizenship competence: [...] the ability to act as responsible citizens and to fully participate in civic and social life, based on an understanding of social, economic, legal and political concepts and structures, as well as global developments and sustainability.</p> <p>7. Entrepreneurship competence: [...] the capacity to act upon opportunities and ideas and to transform them into values for others. It is founded upon creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving, taking the initiative and perseverance and the ability to work collaboratively in order to plan and manage projects that are of cultural, social or financial value; and</p> <p>8. Cultural awareness and expression competence: [...] involves having an understanding of and respect for how ideas and meaning are creatively expressed and communicated in different cultures and through a range of arts and other cultural forms. It involves being engaged in understanding, developing and expressing one's own ideas and sense of place or role in society in a variety of ways and contexts.</p>	

<p>Norway</p>	<p>Education and Bildung The school's mission is the education and all-around development (Bildung) of all pupils. Education and all-around development are interlinked and mutually dependent, and their underlying principles should help schools accomplish this dual mission. Primary and secondary education and training an important parts of a lifelong process which has the individual's all-around development, intellectual freedom, independence, responsibility and compassion for others as its goal. The teaching and training shall give the pupils a good foundation for understanding themselves, others and the world and for making good choices in life. It shall also provide a good point of departure for participation in all areas of education, work and societal life.</p>	<p>Five basic skills The curriculum defines five basic skills:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reading 2. Writing 3. Numeracy 4. Oral skills 5. Digital skills. <p>These skills are part of the competence in the subjects and necessary tools for learning and understanding them. They are also important for developing the identity and social relations of each pupil and for the ability to participate in education, work and societal life. The subject curricula establish the content of the various subjects and are based on the following definition of competence: <i>Competence is the ability to acquire and apply knowledge and skills to master challenges and solve tasks in familiar and unfamiliar contexts and situations. Competence includes understanding and the ability to reflect and think critically.</i> This understanding of the competence concept must underpin the school's work with the subject curricula and the assessment of the pupils' competence in the subjects.</p>
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(continued)

Table 15.1 (continued)

	Main aims of education	Main competences
<p>Kosovo</p> <p><i>Mastery of key competences</i></p> <p>One of the main aims of education in Kosovo is the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values required by a democratic society. This will enable young people to become active and responsible citizens so that they deal constructively with the challenges of diversity, as well as cultivate and respect their own rights and the rights of others.</p> <p>The education system in Kosovo enables individuals to become independent, able to fulfil their personal life and to contribute to the continuous progress, prosperity and welfare of Kosovar society.</p> <p>The aims of education are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the development of personal and national identity, statehood and cultural belonging; • the promotion of general cultural and civic values; • the development of responsibility for themselves, for others, for society and for the environment; • preparation for life and work in the context of social and cultural changes; development of entrepreneurship and use of technological skills; • preparation for lifelong learning. 	<p>Six key competences</p> <p>1. Communication and expression competences: [...] in the mother-tongue; [...] in foreign languages; [...] through various types of signs, symbols and artistic codes; [...] through the use of information technology;</p> <p>2. Thinking competences: Exercising mathematical competence, as well as basic competences in science and technology; Exercising digital competences; Understanding, analysing, judging, synthesizing; Developing abstract thinking; Making information and evidence-based decisions; Linking decisions with their consequences; Assessing and self-assessment; Problem-solving.</p> <p>3. Learning competences: Learning to learn; Knowing, selecting and making use of learning instruments and methods; Mastering reading, writing, mathematics, science, and information and communication technology; Identifying and processing information in an independent, effective and responsible way; Learning in teams and exchanging positive experiences.</p> <p>4. Life, work and environment-related competences: Presenting oneself in the best way, emphasizing one's own capabilities; Working independently and as a member of a team; Organizing and leading learning and social activities; Demonstrating entrepreneurial skills, planning knowledge for work, and rational use of time; Mastering abilities for conflict management and risk assessment; Undertaking independent and responsible actions; Engaging in environmental protection and development.</p> <p>5. Personal competences: Demonstrating an understanding of oneself and others; Demonstrating self-confidence; Managing one's emotions and stress; Exercising empathy for others; Demonstrating one's ability to conduct a healthy lifestyle; Making general choices related to personal health; and</p> <p>6. Civic competences: Competences for interpersonal, cultural, and social relationships; Understanding and respecting diversity among people [...]</p>	

Adapted from OECD (2018), the Council of the European Union (2018), MER (2017), and MEST (2016)

reform. To some extent, only Norway's education aim stands out since it is the only framework of the four that refers to *Bildung* (described as all-round development but not elaborated in detail), making it a priority policy goal. In this regard, Norway's educational framework maintains its commitment to *Bildung* as one of the core elements of *Didaktik* (Hopmann, 2007). Further, the centrality of *Bildung* in Norway's educational framework confirms its designation as a 'Didaktik country' (Tahirsylaj, 2019a). The concepts used in Norway's aims of education, such as 'understanding oneself, others, and the world', 'independence', 'responsibility', etc., echo a Klafkian conception of *Bildung* in terms of self-determination, co-determination, and solidarity.

Another similarity across the aims of education in the frameworks is the reference to the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, which is the prevailing definition of competences within competence-oriented education frameworks that are tracked back to the OECD's Definition and Selection of Competences (DeSeCo) project (Tahirsylaj & Sundberg, 2020). Norway is the outlier here again since it does not refer to competence specifically in the aims. Of interest here are also the notions used in the OECD and EU/EC frameworks, such as 'sustainable future' and 'sustainable growth', which on the one hand, highlight a present global concern over sustainability while at the same time signalling economic thinking with the reference to growth as a way to address sustainability. These positions echo the ideals of efficiency and effectiveness as promoted by curriculum-based social efficiency ideology.

Yet another similarity across the frameworks is the emphasis on education goals towards developing students into active and responsible citizens, who, in turn, contribute to more inclusive, equal, and democratic societies. In particular, the OECD highlighted the role of education in the development of students not only for the world of work but also to become active and engaged citizens, expanding their vision from the limited instrumentality of education. Still, what seems to be *affirmed* in all educational frameworks is the consensus on the need for the further development of democratic societies.

Now turning to competences promoted by the four education frameworks, the OECD highlights three 'transformative competences': creating new value, reconciling tensions and dilemmas, and taking responsibility (OECD, 2018). The EU/EC framework lists eight key competences: literacy competence, multilingual competence, mathematical competence and competence in science, technology, and engineering, digital competence, personal, social, and learning-to-learn competence, citizenship competence, entrepreneurship competence, and cultural awareness and expression competence (The Council of European Union, 2018, pp. 7–8). Norway promotes five basic skills – reading, writing, numeracy, oral skills, and digital skills – which are then stated to be part of the competence in the subjects (MER, 2017), and the definition of competence in the framework follows the definition found in the OECD and the EU/EC framework. Kosovo notes six key competences: communication and expression competences; thinking competences; learning competences, life, work, and environment-related competences, personal competences; and civic competences (MEST, 2016). The competences in Kosovo's framework are

adapted from those recommended in the EU/EC framework (Tahirsylaj, 2018). While the number of competences and labels ascribed to them vary across the four frameworks, the overall trend clearly points towards a convergence of curricula promoting competences as the main outcomes of education. Even in Norway's case, where *Bildung* is stated as one of the two main policy aims of education, *Bildung* is not referenced in connection to competences. For more, Norway's framework clearly states that "[...] the competence concept must underpin the school's work with the subject curricula and the assessment of the pupils' competence in the subjects' (MER, 2017, p. 13). Such a statement in Norway's framework hints that the declared aim for a dual mission in terms of education and *Bildung* (in Norwegian: *utdanning og danning*) is more declarative and less substantial; in practice, the balance is tinkered towards education (*utdanning*), which focuses on competences in the subjects and their assessment, while *Bildung* (*danning*) is sidelined.

At the same time, while indeed *Bildung* as a term is completely absent in the frameworks where they address competences to be pursued, notions of *Bildung* are hinted at throughout, especially in terms of Klafki's three-dimensional notion of self-determination, co-determination, and solidarity, and to some extent Benner's position with regard to the goal of education being the development of students' capability for self-responsible action. For example, when frameworks list competences that require students to develop their mother tongue, foreign languages, digital skills, personal and civic competences, or take responsibility, they are indeed promoting students *Bildung* in every sense of the word. In other words, the competences, if mastered by students, would directly contribute to students' *Bildung* in terms of students developing an understanding of themselves, their communities, and how they can participate in and contribute to society. The problematic part, especially in the OECD and EU/EC frameworks, is that these competences are primarily aimed at supporting economic growth and the capability of students to create products and services that have instrumental value in the market. Another problematic issue here is the lack of students' possibility to challenge either what competences are to be pursued or what aspects of society need to be preserved or changed. From the non-affirmative theory of education, the frameworks fall short of offering students the possibility to really engage in critical discussion of how society is to develop in the future. Instead, the frameworks clearly affirm in normative discourse and language the consensus of the previous generation on what the next generation is to develop into and contribute towards.

Bildung and Twenty-First Century Competences: A Potential Way Forward

What are we to make of the mixed policy orientations found in the institutional and intended curricula as promoted by transnational and national education frameworks? Based on the examples referred to and identified in this chapter, a number of

conclusions are drawn. First, *Bildung* as a concept and as an outcome of education is generally absent in ‘policy-speak’. Even when mentioned, as in Norway’s case, *Bildung* seems to be marginalized in favour of competence development. Second, while *Bildung* is ignored as a term, competences do address concepts and approaches that have traditionally been part of *Bildung* as an outcome of education. This double-speak reveals an interesting scenario that begs for a further empirical study on why that is the case. What can explain the absence of *Bildung* in policy documents, especially in transnational education frameworks? For now, what could contribute towards a more holistic education, would be a scenario where *Bildung* and twenty-first century competences are more coherently addressed in ways that each complements one another and are not cast as opposing alternatives. Thus, mutual recognition of the potential of each of the *Bildung*- and competence-oriented traditions would open up opportunities for the education systems to pursue both affirmative and non-affirmative agendas that serve individuals and societies better. Such positions would keep the possibilities open in the future for young generations to decide for themselves, in the true *Bildung* and *Bildsamkeit* sense, how to shape their individual and collective lives.

An educational reading of the four education frameworks, in turn, shows that curriculum-based social efficiency ideology and, to some extent, social reconstruction dominate the framing of policy goals in terms of competence development. Only in Norway’s case is there a reference to *Bildung* as an outcome of education, confirming that the *Bildung*-oriented education tradition at least is still alive, albeit not as strong as competence-oriented education. Overall, the four frameworks offer guidelines for the development of more detailed subject curricula, which then need to be taught and implemented at the classroom level. It is difficult to predict to what extent the formulations in the four frameworks really affect the educational experiences that students go through in formal schooling. What we can pinpoint here is that the promoted competence-based orientations will not allow students the potential opportunities to critically and reflexively shape their education as a *Bildung*-oriented position would allow from both Klafki’s and Benner’s perspectives. If entirely successful, it can be speculated that a competence-based education will, at best, prepare students who have developed a set of competences (in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values) that will enable them to participate in society (in terms of further education, work, and societal/cultural life), but such participation has more potential to lead to further reproduction of society and not the transformation that is needed to deal with the present and future anticipated and unanticipated challenges. *Bildung*-oriented education is broader than twenty-first century competences and does not entirely fit under the competence-based framework, but twenty-first century competences could easily be linked to the *Bildung* tradition and, as this chapter showed, they can contribute towards students’ *Bildung*. In turn, from NAT’s perspective, education should prepare students to become able, as citizens, themselves to contribute to a dialogue about the future development of society (Uljens, [this volume](#)). Of course, there is no guarantee that a *Bildung*-based tradition would contribute towards an inclusive dialogue for transformation to reframe the position of humanity vis-à-vis the environment (for example, in order to

avoid a potential environmental breakdown), but it might provide for developing a more critical position towards market-oriented thinking that seems to be dominant in competence-based education approaches.

In sum, from Bildung-oriented perspectives, competences are not ‘twenty-first century competences’ as competence has been an inherent part of Bildung long before the turn of the twenty-first century, albeit not in exactly the same ‘language’, while from the social efficiency-based curriculum tradition, the twenty-first century competences are cast as new educational aims that work anytime, anywhere, towards developing individuals that are productive to and competitive in the labour market. There is no place for Bildung in such a perspective since Bildung is not only about ‘the what’ of education, but it is primarily concerned with ‘the why’ of education, which is not solely about being successful in the labour market. In other words, from the Bildung perspective, education is incomplete if we are only concerned with what competences individuals need to achieve for the purpose of producing value in the marketplace. Education would become complete, or ‘educational’ (Hoveid & Hoveid, 2019), if the why of education assisted individuals in creating meaning for their existence beyond participation in the marketplace. Thus, Bildung expands the why of education to include the reflexive and non-affirmative nature of education that contributes to individuals’ own understanding of who they are, what they can (and cannot) become, and how they relate to the world around them. A Bildung-oriented education policy could provide for a more holistic view of the individual and human development as it gives more agency to the individuals to shape their lives on their own terms and resume responsibility accordingly while at the same time offering them the framework to soundly relate to and actively contribute to the society and environment they are immersed into. Such a perspective also includes the educational aim for individuals to become competent and act competently to navigate the complexities of being capable individuals in the world.

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Chapter 16

From ‘Didactics’ to ‘Curriculum-and-Didactics’ and Beyond: A Non-affirmative Approach to the Analysis of the Changes in Didactics in Mainland China



Bangping Ding

Abstract Beginning with a resounding remark about how to regenerate a new civilization made by a Chinese modern philosopher, Hu Shih, this chapter briefly explores the question of why and how to re-establish Chinese pedagogics and didactics in the light of the non-affirmative theory of education in the globalized world of the twenty-first century. An overview of Chinese introduction to European pedagogics and didactics, Anglo-American curriculum studies, and Russian pedagogical theories is provided first, with a reflection on the shifts and changes that have taken place in the process of introduction to those foreign theories during the past century. Then, a reconsideration of the relationship of Chinese education to politics and economy from the perspective of the non-affirmative theory of education is offered, arguing that education should not play the dominant role in politics because education is not equal to politics, nor should it play the dominant role in economics because education is not equivalent to economics. Rather, education has its own role to play: to cultivate individual persons who are open to any ideas and have knowledge, competencies, and skills through which to create the new society that Chinese people desire. Based on the argument above, the author puts forward a fresh idea of how to re-establish Chinese pedagogics and didactics that can confront the challenges of the twenty-first century: to integrate German didactics with Anglo-American curriculum studies based on Chinese harmony. In conclusion, it is believed that with the rise of China in the economy and other fields such as science and technology over the past decades and a re-evaluation of Chinese traditions, there is a new confidence that they should rebuild pedagogical discourses and disciplines, including curriculum studies, didactics, and curriculum and didactics as a blended new discipline.

Keywords Didactics · Curriculum-and-didactics · Non-affirmative theory of education · China

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M. Uljens (ed.), *Non-affirmative Theory of Education and Bildung*,

Educational Governance Research 20,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30551-1_16

About a century ago, when the Fourth of May Movement was in full bloom in 1919, professor Hu Shih, then a Chinese philosopher and later chancellor of Peking University, called upon the Chinese academia by stating that it was time for Chinese intellectuals to begin to ‘explore issues and problems, introduce new theories and methods from the West, to sort out China’s heritage culture, and regenerate a new civilization’ (‘研究问题，输入学理，整理国故，再造文明’), for both China and the world. It is important to note that here Hu Shih emphasizes the importance of both introducing new theories and methods from the West and, at the same time, sorting out national heritage culture and combining them together to regenerate a new civilization in China. Clearly, this is a huge task that has been left unfinished over the past century, and today it is relegated to later generations of intellectuals for its realization.

In terms of the study of education, in the late Qing dynasty (during the period of 1860–1911) and the early nationalist governments (during the period of 1912–1927) of the Republic of China, newly transplanted school systems were patterned first after those of Japan and later after those of the U.S. in the early 1920s. Consistent with the newly established school systems, a new teacher education system was also adopted from other countries, including Japan, Germany, France, and above all, the U.S. It was in those times that Herbartian pedagogics¹ ² and didactics were introduced into China at the beginning of the new century (1901–1919) via Japan, followed by the Anglo-American educational sciences and curriculum studies in the 1920s until the 1940s. This is a point that I emphasise, partly because it has set the tone for the study of education later in China, in fact, until today. Pedagogics and didactics have merged traditions in modern China, as Chinese educators, like their Nordic counterparts, have embraced pedagogics and didactics in the teacher education programs in our teacher education universities. Theorizing education and schooling in terms of pedagogics and didactics has remained with us, although the Anglo-American influence of educational sciences (including curriculum studies) has become increasingly dominant in Mainland China over the past few decades.

Now let us reflect on the introduction of U.S. educational theories in general and on theories of teaching and learning and methods in particular during the period of 1919–1949. This was a time of dominant U.S. influence on Chinese educational theory and practice. At that time, Chinese researchers in education extracted what they thought were universal educational ‘truths’ from the U.S. educational sciences. These ideas were then put into the framework of pedagogics and didactics that had

¹In the Chinese pedagogical literature where ‘Curriculum and Didactics’ (*kecheng yu jiaoxuelun*) appears, its English translation is usually ‘Curriculum and Instruction’ or ‘Curriculum and Teaching Theories’. In my view, both expressions are not a proper translations of them because they largely represent the Anglo-American usage of the terms. To reflect the historical origins of ‘*kecheng yu jiaoxuelun*’ in the Chinese context, I choose to use curriculum & didactics instead here in our text as its English version.

²The term pedagogics is used here to refer to an academic discipline in the university in Mainland China that is equivalent to German *Padagogik*, and it is distinguished from ‘pedagogy’, which is now usually defined as teaching theory and practice in the English-speaking world (see, for example, Watkins & Mortimore, 1999).

been introduced earlier from Germany through Japan at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although the US also inherited the framework of pedagogics and didactics in the latter part of the nineteenth century, in preparing common school-teachers in normal schools, we know that in the U.S. they no longer have pedagogics and didactics as academic disciplines of education.

Later, around the turn of the century, they shifted from the European pedagogical tradition and towards a new tradition of their own—the tradition of the sciences of education. To replace pedagogics and didactics, they developed what they called the 'foundations of education', that is, the psychology of education, the sociology of education, the history of education, the philosophy of science, and curriculum theory. In addition, there were teaching approaches like the *Project Method*, the *Dalton Plan*, etc. Another misunderstanding on the part of Chinese education researchers stemmed from the perception that American educational theories were modern and that modernity was superior to tradition. So, the influential *Project Method* and *Dalton Plan* were both tried out within Chinese schools in the 1920s, and these new teaching methods were (mis)treated as didactics in China, which is, in my view, clearly a misreading and misunderstanding.

For the roughly three decades from 1919 to 1949, curriculum studies, introduced from the U.S., dominated Chinese educational theory, practice, and policy. In 1919, John Dewey was invited to China. He stayed for more than 2 years, lecturing about his philosophical, social, and pedagogical theories across the country in many universities and associations. According to Hua Zhang (2017), in the 1922 curriculum reform in China, the main leaders in education were Dewey's former students such as Hu Shih, Tao Xingzhi, and Zhu Jingnong, etc., and what is more, John Dewey, Paul Monroe, and William Head Kilpatrick directly participated in this curriculum reform and contributed their thoughts and wisdom to it.

After 1949, when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power in Mainland China, the U. S. influence in the humanities and social sciences was thoroughly expunged from the Chinese academia, including educational theories from the U. S. In place of them were the Soviet (Russian) pedagogics and didactics as the dominant influence on the Chinese educational landscape of theory, practice, and policy. This dominance lasted for only about 10 years until 1959 when the rift in Sino-Soviet relations broke out, but its pedagogical influence remained, however. As Russian pedagogics and didactics were also rooted in Germany, so Chinese educational theory and practice once again connected with German pedagogics and didactics, this time via the Soviet Union as a channel. Especially the pedagogics textbook compiled by the Russian educator I. A. Kairov is thought to have inherited Herbartian thought of pedagogics, with the addition of the Soviet educational reform experiences in the 1930s and 1940s.³ So, under the circumstances of siding with the Soviet Union politically and ideologically at the time, it was readily

³Vygotsky and Leontjev were translated into Chinese only in the 1980s. Kairov was introduced to Chinese educators and teachers because he was thought to represent Marxist pedagogical thought in the Soviet Union; besides, Kairov was in charge of Soviet education in the 1950s as minister of education.

accepted by Chinese educators and teachers alike. The Russian pedagogy textbook was mandatory reading for both student teachers and practicing schoolteachers. Dewey was replaced by I. A. Kairov as the authoritative figure in education in the Chinese educational community.

Over the past three decades—largely from 1979 to 2009 and beyond, when Mainland China opened to the world under Deng Xiaoping’s new policy of reforms and opening, Chinese educational discourses have increasingly changed and shifted towards the U. S. paradigm of educational sciences once again, especially in the field of curriculum studies. Simultaneously, contemporary German Didaktik has been introduced into China as well. For example, Wolfgang Klafki was invited to East-China Normal University (ECNU) for an academic visit in the mid-1980s, and Martin Wagenschein’s theory of exemplary teaching was introduced to Chinese educators and teachers, which is quite popular with Chinese teachers. Lastly, Dietrich Benner has been invited to work with colleagues of ECNU for 20 years (Benner, 2023, p. 26), where he shares with Chinese educators and teachers his ideas of non-affirmative theory of education.

In the rest of this chapter, I first outline, in more detail the shifts and changes that have taken place in the Chinese educational landscape. I then try to reflect on these shifts and changes by pointing out the misreading and misunderstanding of didactics introduced from Germany and Russia, respectively, on the one hand, and Anglo-American educational sciences in general and curriculum studies (including teaching and instruction theory) in particular, on the other hand. I argue that didactics as a discipline for teacher education that originates in European culture, and particularly in German culture, is quite different from teaching/instruction theory and teaching methods stemming from the Anglo-American tradition in the English-speaking world. Second, I examine the relationship of education to politics and economy in the history of Chinese education from the perspective of a non-affirmative approach. Finally, I try to offer my thinking about how to integrate the two great traditions of education studies from the west and ground them in the Chinese tradition of culture and educational practice, so that we may create a new pedagogical and educational paradigm on the foundation of the philosophical idea of Chinese Harmonism⁴ (和而不同) in the twenty-first century.

⁴ ‘Chinese Harmonism’ is a new term expressing the ancient Chinese idea expressed in the phrase ‘he er bu tong’ (seeking harmony not sameness (Ames, 2002) or 和而不同), which was put forward by Confucius in the *Confucian Analects*. It means that harmony (‘he’ or 和) is a philosophical idea in Chinese thought that is quite opposed to sameness (‘tong’ or 同), in that the former is an epistemological way of creative knowing that involves trying to absorb various elements from different things to create something new and valuable, while the latter is the opposite (See, Wang, 2012a, b).

A Reflection on the Shifts and Changes That Have Taken Place in Chinese Pedagogics and Didactics

As noted above, great changes have taken place during the past three decades in educational research in general and in didactical research in particular. These changes can be characterized as manifesting themselves in the following ways:

First, with the restoration of college entrance examinations in 1977, educational research was resumed after the Great Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) both in the department, college, or school of education in higher education institutions and in the National Institute of Education Sciences (NIES). Among the educational researchers, many did didactics research. Beginning in the mid-80s, some teacher education universities (which are devoted to preparing school teachers), for the first time in Chinese higher education history, started to train PhD students in didactics. Now there are 21 universities where PhD programs in didactics, subject didactics, or curriculum studies are offered, which has had great impacts on knowledge production as regards research on teaching, learning, assessment, and curriculum on the one hand, and improvement of teaching and learning practices on the other. Under this situation, didactics as a university sub-discipline has separated from pedagogics and become an independent sub-discipline in its own right among educational sciences since the 1980s. In 1985, the National Association for Research on Didactics was established, which holds academic meetings every 2 years.

Second, curriculum studies as a sub-discipline were resumed in Mainland China after a hiatus of three decades, from 1949 through 1979. The emancipation of ideology (*sixiang jiefang* or 思想解放) appeared across the country in 1978 when the CCP intended to shift its focus of work from the class struggle to economic construction. Now the modernization project has brought with it the flowering of many social sciences that had been forbidden to exist during the past three decades. Curriculum studies were one of those social science disciplines that disappeared from the list of bourgeois sciences. As a university sub-discipline, Anglo-American Curriculum Studies was reinstated. At the beginning of the 1980s, curriculum researchers who had trained in the field before 1949 resumed their research and published their works again (Lü, 1994). A new generation of curriculum researchers with PhDs has since grown up and contributed to research into curriculum theories and reforms. A significant event that marked the re-emergence of curriculum studies was the 1981 founding of the journal *Curriculum, Teaching Material, and Method*, a major educational journal that publishes papers on curriculum research in Mainland China. Finally, in 1997, the National Association for Curriculum Studies was established officially.

Third, like in Germany and some other European countries, including Russia, school subjects (i.e., mathematics, the Chinese language, biology, physics, chemistry, etc.) have corresponding teaching methods, research, or subject didactics in Mainland China. In the early 1980s, for school subjects such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, history, geography, and the Chinese language, etc., the national associations for teaching and learning them were established. In teacher

education colleges and universities, there are faculty members and researchers who are responsible for teaching subject didactic courses to teacher education students, or *shifansheng* (师范生). These professionals join hands with teaching researchers, or *jiaoyanyuan*⁵ (教研员), as well as practicing school teachers, to improve teaching and learning of various school subjects. For example, the National Association for Physics Teaching-Learning was established in 1981, and among the members of the association are physics didactics researchers from teacher education colleges and universities, physics teaching researchers or *jiaoyanyuan*, and leading physics teachers from schools. In universities, we find that didactics researchers from the department or school of education have little academic communication with subject didactics faculty members who are located institutionally in various departments or colleges of their subjects (e.g., the department of physics, chemistry, or biology). Subject didactics researchers attend their academic conferences with school subject teachers and teaching researchers or *jiaoyanyuan*, and few of them attend general didactics conferences sponsored by the National Society for Research on Didactics, according to a survey that I conducted recently. This situation creates a huge gap between general didactics and subject didactics researchers, thus blocking communications between the two groups.

Before 1985, teaching methods courses offered to teacher education students were called teaching-learning methods (*jiaoxuefa* or 教学法). In order to improve the quality of the courses, some university researchers emphasized the theorizing of the course and insisted on changing the title of the courses from teaching methods, or *jiaoxuefa* to didactics, or *jiaoxuelun* (教学论)(Ding, 2015). Correspondingly, subject teaching-learning methods (学科教学法) were changed into subject didactics (*xueke jiaoxuelun* or 学科教学论), and since around the turn of the century, they have become the curriculum and didactics of their school subjects (*xueke kecheng yu jiaoxuelun* or 学科课程与教学论), like physics curriculum and didactics, chemistry curriculum and didactics, etc. With the changes in the titles comes the rising status of the disciplines among the academic communities in Mainland China, according to some didactics researchers (Liu, 2005). This is so because of the context of school curriculum reforms, in which these university subject didactics play an increasingly important role in curriculum planning, development, and implementation.

Despite the changes in the title of the discipline, a cursory reading of any textbook of didactics and/or subject didactics will find that Anglo-American research findings on teaching and instruction are widely cited and used in them. In other

⁵Teaching researchers, or *Jiaoyanyuan* (教研员), are recruited from outstanding school subject teachers who are institutionally located out of school and work in local (county or district in cities) bureaus of education under the direct leadership of local educational administrators. Their task is to direct and help school teachers in teaching and implementing new curriculum and experimenting with new methods, monitor educational quality by observing and sitting in on the classes in the subject that they are experts in, and be responsible for setting examination papers for their local areas and nation-wide as well. This system of teaching research was learned in Russia in the 1950s and has remained until now across the country.

words, the educational discourses are mixed in that some didactic languages are mingled with curriculum languages in both journal articles and textbooks of teacher education. The discrepancy and conflict between the two traditions loom so large that one of the leading didacticians in a prodigious teacher education university divides his edited textbook content into two main parts: one devoted to didactics and another devoted to curriculum theory, despite the title name of the book, entitled *Curriculum and Didactics* (Wang, 2004).

Fourth, the relationship between didactics and curriculum studies has been identified as an issue that lends itself to debate between didacticians and curriculum researchers in Mainland China. For one thing, didacticians think that curriculum content should be part of didactics research, and therefore they include the study of curriculum in their didactics textbooks. These didacticians argue that it is unnecessary for curriculum studies to claim itself as an independent discipline. Hence their discipline being called 'large didactics'. On the other hand, curriculum scholars—most of them of the younger generation—opine that teaching and instruction are parts of curriculum studies, and therefore they should belong to curriculum studies, forming the 'large curriculum studies' (Huang, 2006). Other pedagogical scholars argue that both didactics and curriculum studies are considered sub-disciplines under pedagogics, and therefore they are parallel and independent from each other (Wang, 1995). In their view, there can be a division of research between didactics and curriculum researchers, with the former being tasked with researching classroom teaching-learning and the latter being concerned with curriculum development, i.e., the content aspect of schooling. From the cross-cultural perspective of comparative didactics and pedagogy, however, it is well known that didactics originate in the European culture, especially in the German tradition of *Pädagogik*, with both didactics and *Pädagogik* being regarded as normal sciences, while curriculum studies stem from the Anglo-American culture, representing the social science perspective of education. Seen this way, it is easily understood that both didacticians and curriculum researchers in Mainland China have misunderstood the nature of didactics and curriculum studies.

Fifth, the core concepts and terms of scholarship concerned with didactics are confused and misunderstood as well. In Chinese, a series of core concepts and terms of scholarship in relation to didactics is chaotic. For example, *didactics* (*jiaoxuelun* or 教学论) is the official term prevalent in the Chinese pedagogical and educational community, meaning a sub-discipline within pedagogics or educational science, whereas *teaching theory* (*jiaoxue lilun* or 教学理论) is another term also denoting the sub-discipline as well as referring to any specific theory of teaching. Many Chinese educational researchers, including didacticians, do not distinguish between them, however. By disallowing the difference between the two core concepts in use, they cover up the cross-cultural nuances of meaning between them. For one thing, according to these educational researchers, in the U.S., there is a sub-discipline called the theory of teaching within the U.S. educational sciences that seems to be equal to continental-European didactics. However, a leading U.S. professor of curriculum and instruction, Ian Westbury (2000, p. 15), of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, clearly notes that "Didaktik is a tradition of thinking about

teaching and learning that is virtually unknown in the English-speaking world.” In other words, the theory of teaching and instruction within the Anglo-American tradition of the curriculum in the English-speaking world is not didactic in the German sense of the word, although both deal with thinking about teaching and learning in the context of schooling.

Because of the confusion on the part of many Chinese pedagogical researchers without awareness of its European origin and the teaching theory in the sense of its Anglo-American tradition, in the Chinese educational community, there is a misreading and misunderstanding of both didactics and curriculum studies together with its teaching theory (Ding, 2009). For example, one of Jerome Bruner’s books—*Toward A Theory of Instruction*—was translated into Chinese, and ironically, its Chinese title was *Jiaoxuelun* (literally meaning Didactics) (trans. by Yao & Guo, 2008). Similarly, another common misunderstanding happens when the term ‘theory of teaching or instruction’ is used when translating the Chinese term *Jiaoxuelun* (didactics) in the English abstracts of journal papers on didactics.

Sixth, confusing didactics with teaching-learning methods (*jiaoxuefa*) on the part of many Chinese educators and researchers is another issue that demands correcting (Ding, 2015). Historically, this confusion arises out of the fact that Chinese pedagogic scholars first translated didactics of the Herbartian school in the first decades of the twentieth century. In a second step, they introduced U.S. educational theory (especially John Dewey’s theory of education) and teaching approaches such as the Project Method introduced by the American educationist William Heard Kilpatrick (1871–1965) and the Dalton Plan proposed by the American teacher Helen Parkhurst (1886–1973) in the 1920s. These Chinese pedagogics scholars all emphasized the teaching *methods* aspects of both German didactics and the new American educational approaches, thus constructing a teacher education (in China, it is also called normal education or *shifan* education, 师范教育) course out of them named *jiaoxuefa* (教学法, literally meaning teaching-learning methods) in Chinese. In many of the *jiaoxuefa* textbooks compiled by teacher educators from normal colleges and universities in the 1920s through 1940s, one can find that much of the content came from American textbooks of a similar kind at those times, plus the practical experiences of Chinese teachers. In fact, many of the authors of those *jiaoxuefa* textbooks were schoolteachers themselves before they came to teach in normal colleges and universities. This course (i.e., *jiaoxuefa*), and the teacher educator or *jiaoxuefa* instructor who teaches the course to prospective teachers, were warmly welcomed when they gave such lectures to practicing teachers, according to Professor Chen Guisheng (2007, 2014) of ECNU when he recollects his personal experience with his mentor during his university days in the 1950s, as they knew exactly what the teachers wanted to know, that is, the concrete methods of teaching and learning.

Later, after 1949, when Mainland China became a communist country under the CCP’s rule, the American educational influence was radially eliminated and replaced by the pedagogy and didactics of the Soviet Union. However, the teacher education course of teaching-learning methods, or *jiaoxuefa* remained, but the content was changed—mostly borrowed from the Soviet (Russian) textbooks of didactics and

subject didactics, and of course, with the Chinese teaching experiences of school teachers. Like their predecessors in the Nationalist era during the 1920s and 1940s, these teacher educators, or *jiaoxuefa* specialist teachers, were placed towards the periphery in the normal colleges and universities, partly because they were located institutionally in the departments of sciences rather than in the department of education, and partly because they were recruited from experienced school teachers.

It is important to point out here that generations of Chinese educators and teachers seem to have misunderstood the nature of continental European didactics. Among other things, German Didaktik means, first of all, that teachers who know and understand it has a command of pedagogical thinking that empowers them as professionals in teaching and learning. Second, teachers who know didactics have the autonomy and freedom to transform and translate content knowledge and teach it to their students in any way they think professionally appropriate; third, that didactics means teachers teaching less (i.e., restrained teaching) while promoting students to learn more (Hopmann, 2007, 2011). However, Chinese pre-service and in-service teachers alike learn didactics, if any, only to find that it teaches them how to teach students to master the knowledge and skills contained in the textbook. Put another way, didactics only means a *technical tool* that teachers are told to use as the teaching method when giving a lesson, and it cannot guarantee them the autonomy and freedom to teach in a professional way. Similarly, curriculum studies present Chinese teachers with more of a *technical tool* to deal with curriculum and instruction. It is this technical-instrumental view of curriculum studies and didactics, common for many Chinese educators, that allows them to mix and mingle the content of didactics and curriculum studies together without finding them sometimes somewhat incongruent with each other.

A Reconsideration of the Relationship of Chinese Education to Politics and Economy from the Perspective of the Non-affirmative Theory of Education

Going beyond the reflection on the shifts and changes in Chinese pedagogics and didactics, it is now imperative to examine the relationship of Chinese education to politics and the economy at this point in history. Growing up and going to school during the cultural revolution (1966–1976), the present author's personal experience in those years shows that schooling and education served the purpose of politics in that students trained as 'red and expert' political beings, as Chairman Mao said something to the effect that politics is the command, the soul, and the lifeline of all work. In the Chinese context of politics of this kind, education was subordinated to politics, which meant following the CCP beyond doubt. In the communist lexicon, the ideal society was said to be 'Marxist' communism, achieved through continuous class struggles politically and nationalized and collectivized planned work units economically, and Chinese people were led by the CCP to strive for it.

This social experiment in the first 30 years of the People's Republic of China proved to be a failure economically, politically, as well as educationally, hence the reform and opening since 1978 under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping.

If the first three decades of the People's Republic of China could be said to have been subordinated to politics, then the education in the second three decades (1979–2009) of its history (and beyond) might be regarded as being subordinated to the economy—as the country's dominant policy agenda turned to the so-called socialist market-oriented economy. Again, education has lost itself, now in the national wealth-producing movement. With accepting the idea of education as a driving force for the economy, a hidden privatization of education developed. For example, the 9-year compulsory schooling, which began in 1986 when the law of compulsory education was enacted and enforced, was declared free of charge; however, parents of students have had to pay more fees for shadow education, both in and outside of schools, thus having a somewhat heavier burden than before. In higher education, most students have had to pay tuition fees to colleges and universities since 1989, and because of this, some students whose parents are poor have difficulties continuing to university.

Now is the time for the Chinese to reflect on what purpose education should serve in the process of modernization. In hindsight, education should not play the dominant role in politics, as education is not equal to politics, nor should it play the dominant role in economics, as education is not equivalent to economics. In perspective, education has its own role to play: to cultivate individual persons who are open to any ideas and have knowledge, competencies, and skills through which to create the new society that people desire. This resonates with the German educationalist Dietrich Benner's theory of non-affirmative education. In his argument for non-affirmative education, Benner (2023) develops "an idea of education that does not seek to educate future generations either to affirm an existing order or to recognize an order conceived of by educators." (p. 5). He further points out that "the concept of a non-affirmative education...prohibited indoctrination in both directions. In the perspective that I presented, young people were not to be educated to affirm existing conditions or to affirm pedagogical actors as representatives of anticipated conditions but must be enabled to participate in discourses on what is to be preserved and what is to be changed." (p. 5).

Based on Benner's theory of non-affirmative education, Uljens and Ylimaki (2017) further discuss the relation of education to politics, economy, and culture. In their paper, one can identify three existing explanations of how education is related to politics, the economy, and culture. The first mode of thought "understands education as being located within the existing society or culture. This is a socialization-oriented or reproduction-oriented model of education. The second form is, since Rousseau, to conceptualize education as a revolutionary force with respect to societal practices and, therefore, as too radical or utopian in character. A third view, a non-affirmative position, opposes the previous ones by criticizing them for their normative nature in the sense that what is either valuable in an existing society or valued as ideal for a future society is decided upon in advance. Therefore, it is supposed that the previous two models run the risk of indoctrination. Another problem

with these two models is that they do not leave room for developing the principal's, teacher's or learner's ability to decide upon what is to be considered valuable and meaningful. This non-affirmative position represents a pedagogics challenging normality without defining in advance how the future should look like" (Uljen & Ylimaki, 2015, p. 37).

This open and dialectic attitude towards education in relation to politics, economy, and culture serves to place education in perspective; that is, it sees education as education, and it regards education as equal to and alongside such fundamental areas of human practice as politics, art, religion, work, and ethics, in a non-hierarchical order (Benner, 2023, p. 10). In the following section below, I will make use of this concept of non-affirmative education to discuss how to reinvent Chinese didactics and pedagogics in the twenty-first century.

Integrating German Didactics with Anglo-American Curriculum Studies Based on Chinese Harmonism: A Non-affirmative Approach to Integration

Despite (or perhaps because of) the shifts and changes taking place in Chinese pedagogics and didactics, the approach to mixing and mingling German and Russian didactics with Anglo-American curriculum theory was the main device used by Chinese pedagogical and educational researchers in the process of Sinicizing or indigenizing those pedagogical, didactical, or educational theories. This approach has failed, however, as it cannot integrate the two traditions in an acceptable way. What is important is that it lacks a common ground on which the two transplanted approaches to teaching, learning, assessment, and curriculum can have a dialogue with each other in a way that recognizes differences as well as commonalities between them. An alternative approach to genuinely integrating didactics and curriculum theory, I argue, might be predicated on the heritage wisdom of 'Chinese Harmonism' (Tang, 2001; Wang, 2012a, b; Wang, 2009), which repudiates the practice of mixing and mingling different ideas together without producing any new ideas out of them. Rather, 'Chinese Harmonism' recognizes, first, the differences between those traditions and then takes advantage of these recognized differences to innovate and make something new and valuable accordingly, just like the chemical change that takes place in different elements when they happen to encounter each other. This is what the non-affirmative theory of education gives to us in terms of implications. According to Benner (2023, p. 33), the non-affirmative theory of education has been discussed in many areas of educational research, including 'in didactics and science didactics.' And this is congruent with Zhihe Wang's ideas about Chinese Harmonism. According to Zhihe Wang (2012b), a Chinese philosopher now working at a US university, Chinese Harmony 'deals with a range of topics: education, economics, ecology, science, spirituality, and religious diversity. It builds upon the work of Whitehead along with the classical Chinese traditions:

Confucianism, Taoism, and Chinese Buddhism' (p. 155). As an epistemological way of knowing, the concept of Chinese Harmony does not try to treat reality or the world as the same; rather, it teaches people how to discriminate between differences, welcoming them as indispensable resources for creating something new. The misreading and misunderstanding of German Didaktik (especially Herbartian *Padagogik* and *Didaktik*), Anglo-American curriculum studies (especially John Dewey's pedagogical thoughts and the Tyler Rationale), and Russian didactics (especially Kairov's pedagogical and didactical thoughts) on the part of many Chinese educators are mainly due to mistakenly treating them all as universal educational truths—what might be called 'pedagogical scientism.' Such an orthodox interpretation of various traditions as representing the 'truth' fails to see that there are different pedagogies or pedagogical theories versed in different pedagogical cultures and traditions, although it must be acknowledged that there might be some common elements among them when analysed in a matter-of-fact way.

So, what is of paramount significance for us today in the comparative study of didactics and curriculum studies is, to begin with, to change the way we perceive and treat educational and pedagogical ideas and thoughts from other cultures as well as from our own. This approach means to breaking from the traditional way of knowing—merely treating either Anglo-American curriculum studies or German *Didaktik* or Russian didactics as 'modern' models of pedagogies and/or education, thereby totally disregarding rich Chinese pedagogical traditions. Such an integrative research strategy represents an affirmative way of doing comparative research on pedagogics and education. An alternative, non-affirmative approach to genuinely integrating didactics and curriculum theory, we argue, should first of all, know our own pedagogical traditions and value them as the necessary 'knowledge base' upon which to learn from other pedagogical cultures. For the Chinese researchers of didactics and/or curriculum studies, this means that we should, as Wu rightly puts it, 'recover the authentic mode of traditional Chinese life', although this is, he also admits, a 'difficult mission' (Wu, 2011, p.585). It is difficult not because we, as researchers in education, could not literally return to the ancient life of Confucius' time, but because we must do a creative transformation of the tradition to suit modern life. In other words, we must create a new modernity that is substantially different and distinct from that merely transplanted from the West or inherited from the past.

With this necessary 'knowledge base' in mind, and with the awareness of the danger of being homogenized as regards pedagogical theories merely adopted from the Anglo-American curriculum studies, researchers of education can 'do[ing] their damndest [sic] with their minds, no holds barred' (Bridgman, 1947; cited in Berliner, 2002, p. 18), in the process of doing a comparative study of didactics and curriculum studies.

Just take the German idea of *Bildung* as an example. When conducting a comparative study of German *Didaktik*, the idea of *Bildung* must be taken into consideration. Without understanding this core idea of German *Didaktik*, we would miss out on the chance to know the way German teachers conceive and shape their pedagogical activities inside and outside of the classroom. In his recent study of

comparative didactics and curriculum, for example, Ding (2009, 2011, 2015) has found that the core idea of German *Bildung*, although translated into Chinese as *jiaohua* (教化), *taoye* (陶冶), or *jiaoyang* (教养), etc., does not find its way into the discourses of didactics textbooks written by Chinese didacticists. However, this holds true also for the rich meanings of the Russian notion of '*obrazovanie*' ('образование'). Also, as mentioned above, this concept has entered the pedagogical literature as an adopted terminology. Nonetheless, in modern Chinese educational discourse, there is a native term 'bringing up a person through teaching' (教书育人) embedded in the Confucian idea of becoming a 'nobleman' (君子), which could well be integrated into the German idea of *Bildung*, and/or the Russian idea of '*obrazovanie*'. All of them are, among other things, concerned with the aim and purpose of schooling and education, although we should be aware that nuances of meaning are available among these constructs from one culture to another. In other words, if we want to integrate the German idea of *Bildung* or the Russian idea of *obrazovanie* into Chinese pedagogical theory and practice, it is necessary for researchers to do the analytical, constructive, and creative transformation, thus accommodating those adopted ideas from other cultures to the proper roots or traditions that emphasize the idea of becoming 'a nobleman', or bringing up a person through teaching.

On the other hand, while U.S. educational researchers have now argued vehemently for reflective teaching and teacher professionalization over the past several decades, in the Continental European countries where the *Didaktik* tradition has been handed down for more than 200 years, reflective teaching has been a feature of their teacher education and professional development all the time (Westbury, 2000; Terhart, 2003); and teaching in Europe in general, and in Germany, Norway, and Finland in particular, has always been considered an admirable and established profession, just like medicine, law, engineering, etc. Likewise, in the Chinese tradition of education, teaching has been recognized as a respected career since ancient times, except in extremist periods such as the 'Cultural Revolution' (1966–1976), when intellectuals, including teachers, were despised or doubted as harmful to the establishment. Given the similarities between the educational tradition in Continental Europe and the educational tradition in China, we have reason to believe that it might be desirable and meaningful for Chinese educational researchers and teachers alike to re-connect with the German *Didaktik* tradition, especially when the Americanization of the current educational research in China was prominent for quite a long time.

Concluding Remarks

Like many other countries outside of Germany and the U.S., where German *Didaktik* and Anglo-American curriculum studies have been adopted and integrated into their pedagogical studies in their teacher education programs, China has also followed suit in this aspect, where the process of adoption and integration has been fraught with much more difficulty partly because of its unique history and cultural tradition

and partly because of the considerable differences and conflicts between Chinese culture and Western culture. For a long time, Chinese educators have mistaken the different didactic theorizing from Germany and Russia and the Anglo-American curriculum theorizing for the universal scientific truths, without awareness of the distinctions and nuances of cultures between them due to their being embedded in different historical, cultural, and educational contexts. As a result, it follows that much misreading and misunderstanding on the part of Chinese educators have occurred regarding these pedagogical models and theories. In addition, some of them also have, to a certain degree, neglected and despised their own traditions of learning, studying, teaching, and schooling, which might have been conducive to accommodating different western pedagogical traditions and ideas as a cultural foundation to anchor the adopted pedagogical and educational knowledge from other countries. This radicalism in pedagogical and educational thinking in the Chinese educational community reflects the general trend of radicalization in modern intellectual life (see, for example, Yu, 1993), wherein modernity is opposed to tradition.

Now well into the twenty-first century, many Chinese educators (e.g., Ding, 2009; Huang, 2006) have at last recognized the misreading and misunderstanding of Western pedagogical and educational traditions and learned from the past century of academic communication with the West. With the rise of China in the economy and other fields, such as science and technology over the past decades and a re-evaluation of Chinese traditions, comes a new confidence that they should rebuild pedagogical discourses and disciplines, including curriculum studies, didactics, and curriculum & didactics as a blended new discipline (See, e.g., Deng, 2012; Ding, 2015; Ye, 2009). In conclusion, I would like to close with Deng's (2011) statement that 'Both Western thinking and indigenous tradition have to undergo a process of modification, adaptation, and transformation in a particular socio-cultural context, creating hybrid kinds of pedagogy.'

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Part VI
Concluding Reflections and Openings

Chapter 17

Non-affirmative Education Theory as a Language for Global Education Discourse in the Twenty-First Century



Michael Uljens 

Abstract Given the crisis of neoliberal education policy in operation since the 1990s, non-affirmative theories of general education, didactics, and subject matter didactics provide a productive language for global education discourse in the twenty-first century. This school of thought has the capacity to operate as a global meta-language of education due to how it defines the teaching-studying-learning process and how it perceives the dynamic relationship between different forms of societal practices. Given that education praxis occurs at different levels, and does not affirmatively mediate between the learner and society, and educates for a non-hierarchically organised societal praxis, teaching needs to recognise but not instrumentally affirm neither societal interests nor the learner's life world. Rather, non-affirmative pedagogy helps us to identify and empirically study, at different levels, how education co-creates pedagogical spaces for discerning thought and reflexive practices around experiences, knowledge, and values. The approach offers itself as an alternative to contemporary educational policies such as academic factualism, educational performativism and competencism, pedagogical activism, and instructional technologism.

Keywords Global education discourse · Education for the twenty-first century · Academic factualism · Performativism · Educational activism · Technologism

In several ways, this volume scrutinised how the research programme on the non-affirmative theory of education and Bildung provide us with conceptual language to analytically and empirically deal with present-day local, national, and global developments and needs in teaching, curriculum work, and educational governance. Throughout the volume, we asked and tried to answer what strengths the non-affirmative approach offers in conceptualising the relationship between Bildung and education as it pertains to a non-teleological view of the future. The point of

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M. Uljens (ed.), *Non-affirmative Theory of Education and Bildung*,
Educational Governance Research 20,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30551-1_17

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departure was to apply an unorthodox and problematising approach to non-affirmative theory, as it obviously would be a contradiction to treat non-affirmative theory affirmatively. Thus, we need to not only revisit but also partly *rethink* the modern heritage of the theory of education.

The contributions, in different ways, took their point of departure from the long-standing tradition of non-affirmative education theory. As Dietrich Benner pointed out, versions of the constitutive principles are already visible in Plato's way of understanding teaching as an initiative to engage the learner in the pedagogical process. The contributions represented unique and creative voices that deepened some of the assumptions and broadened the applicability of this General Pedagogy approach. For example, in line with previous research, this volume argued that educational leadership needs to be grounded in education theory rather than in organisation theory or policy research and that non-affirmative theory serves such a purpose very well (Uljens, 2015; Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017). By communicating and clarifying the fundamental features of the position, readers were offered the opportunity to learn about the features of the approach. By pointing at what questions this theory aims to answer, the reader may evaluate whether the questions posed are the right ones and if how they were answered are reasonable. In this treatment of non-affirmative education theory, the volume itself aims to follow the principles of educative teaching and summon the reader to engage self-reflectively with the presented ideas, which is a feature of academic reasoning. Indeed, the volume avoided treating non-affirmative theory in affirmative and non-critical ways.

The volume started with the assumption that when profound changes in societies occur, education becomes a central topic of societal debate. Thus, theories of education strongly interweave with societal development at large. Theorising education, therefore, represents a sort of cultural self-reflection on a collective level. Not only educational policies and practices but also educational theories tell us something about who we are and what we want to be for ourselves and others. In this sense, education theory, at some level, always demonstrates anthropological reasoning. In addition, accepting the historicity of conceptual reasoning in education and *Bildung* means accepting that any education theory is valid only relative to its cultural and historical conditions. While universal theories are not possible, general theories are. Taking this condition seriously, the volume argues, we need to articulate in and for what kind of world we theorise about education and what we expect to achieve with such conceptualisations. So, what do we see, and what do we need?

After the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, for many years, European air was full of hope. However, in the aftermath of the 'market state' that came to dominate after 1989 (Reis, 2012), we saw an increasing number of problematic consequences, such as the deregulation of laws, the decentralisation of administration, an increased focus on cost-benefit reasoning and efficiency orientation, in addition to increased privatisation of education and technological standardisation. While technology made the world smaller, we also witnessed increasing cultural plurality and tensions within nation-states, reflecting neo-conservative nationalist movements all over the world. In addition to these

developments, ecological challenges have risen to new, previously unanticipated levels.

We have witnessed an orientation towards performative and competency-based curricula and an idea of increased individual choice in school matters. We have witnessed a reduced focus on egalitarianism and a reduced interest in minimising disparities. The concentration of economic wealth is widely discussed. Over the past 30 years, we have seen the movement from an idea of education serving democratic ideals, citizenship education, and the promotion of humanistic ideals to increasingly viewing education and cultural expression as tools serving economic ends.

It is widely acknowledged that the shift towards neoliberal education policies that promote competition as a vehicle to improve educational outcomes, as well as corresponding technologies of governance (Pettersson et al., 2017), has had profound consequences for professional activity, identity, and development in the education sector (Normand, 2016). These ongoing changes are far from being simply functional or organisational; they are also ideological. There is also a risk of transforming educational research to serve either as a tool for instrumental efficiency or as some form of ideologically driven activism. Interventionist action research and school developmental approaches have grown strong after three decades of the use of the qualitative methodology. Some of the interventionist approaches have been tamed to serve policy-directed school improvement; other approaches represent more emancipatory approaches. As shown in this volume, non-affirmative education theory does indeed possess the own necessary qualities to operate as a theoretical platform for school development research that is neither instrumental nor affirmative.

Both expected and unintended consequences have resulted in increasing mistrust regarding whether the global neoliberal policy provides sustainable solutions for guiding reform in the public sector, including education. Nationalist tendencies have been strengthened all over the world. These counterproductive consequences make it central to see connections between neoliberal economic globalisation, national and transnational governance policies, educational ideals, curriculum, teaching, and leadership practices. While the tradition of didactics, most often framed by a nation-state perspective, is still relevant given the crucial character of the nation-state as an organising body, a transnational or 'globopolitan' (Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017, p. 107f) perspective needs to complement the nation-state perspective because of increasing interdependency across all societal sectors.

Although the volume is extensive regarding topics discussed, not all possible issues were scrutinised. For example, regarding the existential and co-existential aspects of non-affirmative theory, we may ask: What social practices, in addition to education, deserve to be identified in a theory of education? Over the years, there have existed many bids regarding which societal and human practices should be included. Schleiermacher (1826) identified ethics, politics, and education. In addition to these, Flitner (1961) pointed out theology, while Fink (1978) and Derbolav (1987) argued for broader systems.

However, perhaps more central than arguing which human practices are included in such systematisation is the idea that these practices are non-hierarchical. The non-hierarchical relations between societal forms of practice, incorporated as an essential feature premise in non-affirmative General Pedagogy, make historical sense only after embracing a non-teleological cosmology regarding how we explain the origin and future of the world and humanity. Therefore, while the constitutive principles are valid a priori, the regulative principles receive their validity because they indeed make sense when we explain how education relates to other societal forms of practice in liberal and modern societies. They are especially helpful in assisting the analysis of the task of education in democratic policies. Neither the constitutive principles nor the non-teleological view, combined with liberalism as represented, for example, by the Finnish Hegelian philosopher Johan Vilhelm Snellman, stood in no conflict with later developments toward a contemporary form of political democracy.

Today we need to ask: ‘How should *nature* be incorporated into such a system of existentials and co-existentials?’ One might argue that nature is already indirectly present in accepting corporeality as an existential aspect besides reason, language, and history. Yet nature cannot be reduced to human corporeality. In a Hegelian tradition, nature is primarily related to the co-existential ‘work’. It is by moulding nature and transforming nature into a culture that the human being identifies herself as human. However, in such a view, there is a risk of subordinating nature to human interests and not endowing it with a value of its own. Today, when humanity has realised that not only human culture depends on nature, but also that nature is dependent on culture, the role of nature in discussing existential and co-existentials must be addressed anew. In the future, we need to develop a view where we consider nature an ultimate foundational principle or factor beyond any kind of existential and co-existential elements, and that is something that all other human practices must consider.

Given shared global dilemmas there is an increasing need for an intercontinental dialogue on education, teaching, and learning. Such a dialogue requires a shared conceptual language. This volume has argued such a language may develop by making explicit and rethinking fundamental features of the *modern tradition* of theorising education, teaching, and learning. This strategy is arguably viable, as the seminal concepts of the modern tradition form a shared point of reference when aiming to explain education theoretically. Despite considerable variation in reception and later developments, the modern pattern of thought implicitly carries curriculum-making and teaching practices across varying political and cultural contexts globally.

While increasing research specialisations within education indeed help us describe the “different parts of the elephant”, the societal developments of the past decades clearly point towards a need for a more general and all-encompassing approach to education theory that operates with a systemic ambition and complementary perspectives instead of disparate and exclusionary ones. This volume accepted the challenge of responding to an existing and urgent need to find new ways of conceptualising education, ways that take us beyond the instrumentalist competency paradigm promoted by economics.

This book was authored and edited with the conviction that the non-affirmative theory of education offers itself as a more comprehensive language of education, especially in comparison with given education policy developments worldwide over the past three decades. However, we do not wish to end up repeating a battle between, for example, conservative and transformative ideals of education. Such approaches tend to, in the end, make education a tool for external interests in ways that may endanger the political ideals of democratic societies and limit the space for knowledge-informed public rational reasoning. In this light, non-affirmative education theory offers itself as an alternative for the twenty-first century. How does the non-affirmative approach to the *theory* of education differ from existing schools of thought?

In dealing with these contemporary challenges in educational policymaking and theorising, one idea often recurs. According to this frequently occurring answer, the solution lies in radically reforming and redirecting present-day education practices, as they appear inappropriate concerning existing and future challenges. The argument is that continuing such practices would only prolong an unfavourable situation, as new generations would continuously be socialised into practices that do not contain the required solutions. Instead, research should contribute to renewed policies and the development of new curriculum ideals and practices, as well as new leadership policies that can turn things right for the future. This is precisely the argumentation structure that Rousseau (1762) applied in his famous preface to *Émile* in advocating for a new, transformative, or reformative education practice. Here, education was the instrument for creating a new, preferred social order. From twentieth-century history, we can find many examples of how normative education ideals and policies, put into practice by affirmative education, have not hindered developments opposite to the intended ones. The fall of the Berlin Wall is a paradigmatic example. East-German normative education did not stop people from tearing down the Berlin Wall.

Instead of continuing to turn to normative education after WWI, many Western countries put their hope in a democratic education ideal combined with a high educational level. This is the solution we have applied to solve many global developments. Also, today, many voices require a strengthened focus on policies promoting critical, constructive, and responsible individuals and citizens, with reflected personal identity, cultural belonging, and political awareness. Such subjects, the argument goes, would be capable of recognising others and being socially responsible, extending the responsibility to future generations. A long tradition of broad self-formation or *Bildung*-centred education shares these ideals and values (Klafki, 1994; Benner, 2015). In other words, Western education policies have, for decades, approved of, defended, and practised such ideals as leading principles. Education for personal and cultural identity, political and economic citizenship, and education for global humanity and international solidarity has been strongly guiding principles. Despite education along these ideals for the past 50 years, we have witnessed the previously mentioned increase in global competition, new ecological challenges, curricular developments oriented towards more performative competencies, and accountability-based leadership and evaluation practices. In such a scenario, we

may ask whether non-affirmative education theory is a solution or part of the problem. Perhaps stronger ideological and normative positions in education theory that support rather than question education policies are the right way to go. This idea takes us to the core of the tasks of academic education and scientific research. Non-affirmative education theory defends the preservation of spaces for critical reflection, spaces that are not limited to serving pragmatic or ideological interests of various kinds. The idea of the critically reflecting and acting citizen in cultural, ecological, political, and knowledgeable questions is still worth pursuing, especially if we appreciate a citizenship that is capable of thinking beyond what is and acting in the interests of all. To conclude, although they overlap, educational theorising is not the same as educational policymaking. If they are not the same, how should we move beyond theories that subordinate educational practice to politics in unproblematic ways, either in a socialisation- or transformation-oriented sense? If we value developing citizenship featuring a democratic mindset, then moving beyond such positions is necessary.

Non-affirmative Theory as a Critical Theory

Despite all socially organised education being political and despite all educational theory featuring values, this volume assumed it would be a mistake to equate pedagogical practice with political practice. Similarly, it would be a mistake to equate educational theory with curriculum policy, political ideology, or political utopia. Education and politics are related, yet we cannot deduce either from the other without violating the idea and character of each. In a non-democratic polity, education is, by definition, strictly subordinate to politics. In any version of politically democratic societies—liberal, conservative, republican, or some other—the task of education is to prepare for political reflection and the readiness to act and participate in self-directed ways. Such education is, of course, also value-bound in that it recognises and respects political freedom of thought and the right to political convictions. However, such education is not about deciding what direction political interests should take. Such pedagogical practice does not take any ideology for granted but problematises them all for pedagogical reasons, thereby creating opportunities for learners to make up their minds. In this light, non-affirmative education is anarchistic in a limited pedagogical sense of the word. It does not reject the state as a liberal mode of social organisation.

There is a moral imperative inherent in non-affirmative education theory. For example, while teaching in schools needs to make established knowledge accessible to students, teachers' responsibilities are not limited to affirming culture, existing societal practices or future political or educational ideals without making them objects of critical reflection by students. Such behaviour would imply reducing education to art, aiming at fulfilling given, specified aims that overlook the students' contribution to establishing the meaning of these contents and aims.

Education would then result in technical instrumentalism. Still, by law, leaders and teachers in public school systems are expected to follow the spirit of a curriculum and must recognise such interests.

Non-affirmative Theory in Understanding School Teaching

While the first part of the volume clarified the fundamental features of non-affirmative education theory, Part II of the volume dwelt on these assumptions, especially from the perspective of educational teaching in schools. In his chapter, Thomas Rucker convincingly demonstrates how a non-affirmative approach to Didaktik/didactics implies a view of school teaching that is educative. He clarified how both school teaching and school development appear in the light of non-affirmative education. His contribution identifies various dimensions of non-affirmative, which are important in the context of educative teaching, namely, objective insight, value judgements, and many-sidedness. His point was that when school development is focused on developing teaching in schools, these dimensions of educational teaching operate as guiding criteria.

In her chapter, Ling Lin continued arguing for the benefits of turning back to Herbart's ideas of educational teaching. Her point was to demonstrate how big data-based measurement and assessment in education, which are expanding worldwide, conceptually obscure the relationship between teaching and learning. In short, these assessment programmes systematically overlook that 'studying' mediates between teaching and learning outcomes. Therefore, learning outcomes are not valid indicators of the quality of teaching. Numerical symbols are incapable of opening up the relational dynamics between teaching and students' studying activities.

Part II ended with Michael Uljens' chapter on a Bildung-based, non-affirmative interpretation of school didactics. Given that learning occurs everywhere, there is reason to identify the specific nature of school learning. Viewing education as a multilevel phenomenon, the chapter demonstrated not only how the constitutive but also the regulative principles developed by Dietrich Benner were highly relevant from a school-based didactic perspective. The idea of didactics as a science, not of the teaching-learning process, but the teaching-studying-learning process, as argued 25 years ago, was conceptually clarified by making use of the notions of summoning to self-activity and *Bildsamkeit*. The chapter also pointed out that this education theory emphasises that understanding teaching in classrooms requires relating it to pedagogical dimensions of educational leadership at different levels. If the regulative principle, called the 'transformation of societal interests into legitimate pedagogical practice', is expected not to violate the realisation of non-affirmative educative teaching, then the pedagogical dimensions of school leadership, governance, and school development also need to follow the same principles. A non-affirmative curriculum and governance policy are easier to apply in democratic societies with a multi-partisan electoral system, while governments in two-party systems, or bipartisan politics, more often and more strongly make use of the

education system to push their own political agendas. This demonstrates how dilemmas in education systems may point to a need to reform the political culture, not least regarding bipartisan electoral systems. Given the globally influential role of the US, the ongoing development of its bipartisan political life is worrying.

Non-affirmative Education and Related Theoretical Positions

Following the ideal of non-affirmative treatment of non-affirmative education theory, Part III of the volume broadened the topics towards related theoretical positions.

Andrea English demonstrated how the non-affirmative approach relates to the Deweyan understanding of education. She reminded readers of the primacy of listening to teachers' work. Listening as a mode of pedagogical activity reflects recognising the student's voice. Listening also creates space for students to voice their own interpretations, thus making them an object for shared reflection. Such a pedagogy requires tact. Learning to *listen* to the content of others' argumentation is also an important aspect of public discourse that carefully engages with the difference between opinion and knowledge.

For more than half a century, the ideals of social justice have been guiding principles in organising education all over the world. Today, the concept covers many more aspects than how families' socioeconomic status influences students' school performance. In contemporary school systems, positive discrimination is a widely applied policy. Despite the crucial role of the distributive view of justice, Juan José Sosa Alonso argues for the need to develop a complementary perspective on justice in education. By drawing on Gadamer's and Foucault's interpretations of Plato, the chapter identifies the possibility for non-affirmative theory to deal with justice as a virtue, evolving in and through the pedagogical process. Only in this way can we ensure a just society.

While teaching includes making the world accessible from various perspectives, teaching itself also features unique forms of interpretative activity and understanding present in the pedagogical relationship. The chapter by Michael Uljens and Mari Mielityinen argues for two ways of dealing with hermeneutics in education. In the first step, they argue for the need to utilise different notions of subjectivity and intersubjectivity when talking about the pedagogical process. While the learner already shares the world with the teacher in some sense, education aims to establish new ways of sharing the world, thereby aiming at a different kind of intersubjectivity than the one from which education started. The same holds true for subjectivity. This chapter then views summoning and *Bildsamkeit* as notions that speak about the transformation between various ideas of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. This process involves different interpretative activities that hermeneutics helps us talk about.

In the final chapter in this section of the volume, Johannes Türistig and Malte Brinkmann turn to Egon Schütz's phenomenology and Pierre Bourdieu's sociology to expand Dietrich Benner's interpretation of non-affirmative education. The critique started by questioning the dualism between socialisation and *Bildung*-oriented

transformation. To overcome this dualism, the chapter argues that by accepting the primacy of the life world, habits and opinions form the foundation of justice. Given this, habitus cannot only be seen as an object to be affirmed or transformed. The phenomenological and sociological approach then allows us to talk about the lived dimensions of pedagogical practice as they relate to power dimensions in society.

Taken together, these four chapters are successful both in expanding the interpretations of non-affirmative theory and in problematising some of the basic assumptions of non-affirmative education theory.

Non-affirmative Education and Empirical Research

Two developments feature more recent empirical education research. The first is an interest in asking how educational research may support school development. The second is an awareness of understanding education from a multilevel perspective. These are not the only characteristics, but they are obvious and global. The three chapters of Part IV of the volume deal with these two developments from the perspective of non-affirmative education theory.

The first chapter, by Hanno Su and Johannes Bellmann, continues a sort of non-affirmative treatment of non-affirmative education theory. In their chapter, they point out some aspects they found inconsistent regarding non-affirmative. The main point of the chapter was, however, to reflect on whether a non-affirmative theory of education necessarily requires a non-affirmative concept of educational research and how such an approach would differ from empirical-analytic, historical-hermeneutic, and ideology-critical approaches. While these positions are primarily epistemological, they remain silent regarding the research object—pedagogical processes. Su and Bellman then argued that empirical research based on these approaches is affirmative. Partly drawing on research by Jacques Rancière, the chapter concluded by pointing out the possibilities for developing non-affirmative action research.

The second chapter in this section is a comparative study of how non-affirmative education theory relates to the fourth generation of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), which was developed by Yrjö Engeström. While the approaches obviously differ, they also share many of the same root assumptions. Both theories highlight the cultural-historical context of education and recognise the importance of education as aiming to support an individual's achievement of autonomy and emancipation through self-activity. The chapter perceived non-affirmative education theory primarily as an initiative within systematic education to ontologically conceptualise education by identifying foundational features as cultural and historical phenomena. In turn, CHAT was perceived as a general systems-theoretical approach to be used as a point of departure for action research aiming to achieve a change in praxis, yet not by directing praxis from an outside interest. The chapter argued that CHAT, in its different steps for the research-supported development of praxis, makes use of

constitutive principles from NAT. However, CHAT does not contain much of the normative character of the pedagogical interventions it promotes.

Taken together, these two chapters contributed new perspectives regarding how research-supported school development might be designed. Non-affirmative theory offers a theory of educational praxis and does not treat any societal praxis with the same universal apparatus that CHAT does. In turn, CHAT represents an internationally widespread approach to action research regarding its design.

With the growing awareness of the role of educational governance in school development initiatives, it is clear that we need to pay more attention to educational leadership as a topic for educational research. All too often, the perspective is limited to either the classroom or the individual school. Especially if empirical research focuses on the regulative principle of how societal interest transforms into legitimate pedagogical practice, then educational leadership cannot be grounded in organisational theory. In her chapter, Ann-Sofie Smeds-Nylund highlights the dilemmas related to municipal leadership. Like some other chapters in the volume, Smeds-Nylund was able to point out how empirical research on educational leadership, starting from non-affirmative theory, can utilise ideas developed by Vivien Schmidt regarding discursive institutionalism.

Non-affirmative Education and Contemporary Curriculum Policies

The last section of the volume, Part V, consists of a critical discussion of contemporary educational governance policies. This section started with a chapter by Leif Moos, in which he introduces the main tensions developed in Part V of the book. He discerned and identified features of, on the one hand, a democratic *Bildung* discourse that developed during the ideal of the social-democratic welfare state and, on the other, an outcomes-based discourse that developed over the past 30 years in the so-called neoliberal competition state. Utilising Foucault's view of discourse, he then reflected on a kind of contract government in Denmark.

As the next step in this section, Andreas Nordin addressed transnationally occurring and very influential principles in data-driven curriculum policymaking. Following the distinction made by Leif Moos, Nordin reminded us that this global discourse also follows certain educational ideals (i.e. competitiveness, objectivity, and distance). In the reconstructive part of his chapter, he supports non-affirmative education theory as an alternative and more reflexive language for policymaking.

If non-affirmative education theory is to be perceived more broadly as a fruitful idea, then there is a need for a comparative dialogue between the *Bildung* paradigm and, for example, twenty-first-century competencies. In his chapter, Armend Tahirsly delves into the similarities and differences between these two schools of thought.

Finally, while policy borrowing is indeed an old-age phenomenon, in a globalised world, this phenomenon has not diminished. Policy borrowing has been studied in several ways. Using non-affirmative education theory, this chapter describes the reception of foreign education theories in China. Bangpin Din argued that while China applied an affirmative mode of policy borrowing for most of the previous 100 years, the modus of reception has developed into a sort of reflected non-affirmative engagement with perspectives developed in other cultures. He exemplified this with how German Didaktik was introduced at the beginning of the twentieth century and how Kairov's pedagogy was imported from the Soviet Union. The more recent engagement with contemporary curriculum theory and European Didaktik (didactics) features a more reflective attitude.

Non-affirmative Education Theory as a Language for the Twenty-First Century

Throughout the volume, we have argued that the non-affirmative education theory is not a value-neutral position. It defends certain educational ideals, which are essential for democratic politics and a view of the future as non-teleological (i.e. laying in the hands of humanity itself). There is still reason to remind us of the difference between emphasising autonomy as an educational ideal and emphasising what ideals this autonomy should strive for. In this sense, the distinction between affirmative and non-affirmative in some respects, may be seen as two positions on a continuum rather than two excluding positions. Due to its relative openness and by avoiding narrow normative, prescriptive recommendations, the approach may operate as an analytical vehicle in empirical settings to ask how and to what extent educational policies or practices promote legitimate educational ideals. Thus, it is reasonable not only to compare this theory of education with other *theories* of education but also to reflect on this position in relation to other curricular policy positions. If read this way, the non-affirmative approach offers an alternative to the following contemporary educational ideologies or policy positions: They all feature specific views on educational aims, contents, and methods.¹

Academic Factualism A longstanding tradition, but also recent initiatives in curriculum and didactics, as well as in education policy, argue in favour of solving the dilemmas of today's world with a stronger focus on increasing disciplinary knowledge rather than viewing our challenges as moral and political dilemmas. Such a content-based system favours teaching as the transmission of knowledge to students and typically downplays the learner's role. Non-affirmative education also values the learning of generally accepted and tested knowledge. By learning such knowledge, the subject may transcend his or her unique individual experience and way of understanding the world. Yet, to be meaningful from an *educational* perspective, the

¹ Compare with the Chap. 15 by Armend Tahirslay in this volume.

learner needs support for critical reflection on such knowledge and how it is value-related, to establish its meaning. Non-affirmative theory views learning the contents as a means to develop the student's critical thinking. In this respect, in *Bildung* as a process, the learner reflexively embraces the culture while simultaneously being embraced by the culture. Non-affirmative theory reminds us of that learning and that this process is an unending one, whereby it becomes a continuous task for the subject. It is a position that offers a rare combination of stability and openness in the individual's relationship with herself, others, and the world.

Furthermore, so-called factual knowledge by itself does not provide any advice for action. We know that there is no direct path from knowledge to action. Knowing what something is, we cannot conclude what it should be in the future. In addition, although the rational reason may be helpful in moral issues, analytical thinking does not offer conclusive solutions. Such educational or *academic factualism*, promoting the learning of knowledge without discernment of its morals or personal meaning, represents a limited, rationalist, idea of the individual as a self-determined subject. Such an approach to *Bildung* also reminds us of the traditional 'material' approach to *Didaktik*, often prevalent in subject matter didactics. Unfortunately, the ongoing psychologisation of education as an academic discipline supports this rationalist ideal of learning. After all, much educational psychology limits its focus to the attainment of (learning) conceptual knowledge, but psychological approaches often lack theoretical tools to discuss how selected content would be educative in nature.

While *Bildung*-centred non-affirmative education theory is aware of the value dimensions of knowledge, it also reminds us of the importance of maintaining a difference between opinions and knowledge, *doxa* and *epistémé*. In a world of opinions on social media, learning to reason rationally by following established ideas of truthful knowledge is crucial. However, this is not a good argument for defending academic factualism as a curricular principle.

Educational Performativism and Competencism A second contemporary orientation in curriculum policymaking is content with promoting performative competencies. This position, *educational performativism and competencism*, argues that it is sufficient if individuals can *perform* the tasks needed in, for example, working life. For this, the individual needs to acquire certain competencies. With such arguments, authorities in many places expect, for example, higher education institutions to validate competencies achieved in 'real life'. Such policies clearly downplay the worth of conceptual or theoretical knowledge and reasoning, which offer necessary conceptual insights making visible the invisible dimension of practical matters at hand. In addition to its normative foundations, educational performativism and competencism, driven by technical, instrumental, and social efficiency, typically aim to increase economic effectiveness. As an educational ideal, this orientation diminishes the subjects' ability to reach self-determination in a broader sense. A different version of practice-oriented curriculum policy corresponds with research on situated cognition and legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice. This direction might deserve the title of educational contextualism.

Educational Activism A third developmental line in curriculum work is the familiar idea of subordinating education to political and religious interests and ideologies. We call this position *educational activism*, in which the values promoted by education are unquestioned and self-evident—for the proponents. The pedagogical challenge is limited to the transformation or reconstruction of society by (a) transferring predetermined practices and experiences or (b) implementing new ideals for the future. An example of the first is a contemporary neo-conservative ‘cultural canon’ movement. In an increasingly multicultural world, curriculum policy based on a ‘cultural canon’ defines the core features of what it is to be an ‘educated’ or qualified member of a society or nation. An example of the second position is limiting education to allow the growing generation to dream but only a given, predetermined dream. In both cases, education operates instrumentally to promote external interests. The utopian version of educational moralism emphasises social, cultural, and political agency but strives to promote predetermined values to be carried out by future activists. Activist pedagogy often operates in the interests of politicised education policy, which differs from non-affirmative political citizenship education (*Politische Bildung*). While democratic polities defend their obvious right to establish curricular norms *politically* to guide education, these policies, especially multiparty-oriented governments, typically understand that sufficient room must be reserved for *pedagogical* critique and debate of the interests promoted. Therefore, the non-affirmative theory argues that if the space necessary for the subject’s own will formation is sacrificed, education in such systems may become counterproductive, not only for democratic life but also for otherwise dynamic culture and economy.

Educational Technologism Finally, recent developments in artificial intelligence and robotics, combined with the global pandemic, have once again turned attention to the constantly recurrent focus on *teaching methods* and media. Without a doubt new technology has provided promising and previously unseen possibilities to offer and organise education if we only recognise the risks associated with overemphasising these possibilities. From history, we are familiar with the hope connected to the instructional method. Since Comenius, we have been familiar with the idea of ‘teaching all things to all men’ by a universal *method*. We call such a position *educational technology*. Recent technological developments require a serious rethinking of, for example, the social character of human teaching and learning, as well as a rethinking of the extent to which advanced intelligent systems, may support pedagogical processes. However, this *method* is only single-dimensional. In a fragmented educational research culture, there is a risk that this research direction will come to live a life of its own. A related reductionist position consists of initiatives to consider communication theory as the foundation of didactics.

A non-affirmative approach to education and *Bildung* views the previous four policy tendencies as one-eyed. First, each perspective typically perceives itself as superordinate to the others. Second, not acknowledging the dynamics between the topics raised by balancing and questioning each against the ambitions of another

dramatically reduces the subject's possibilities to develop towards self-determination and a reflected will. These educational aims correspond with understanding societal practices as non-hierarchical and the future as non-teleological.

The non-affirmative theory provides us with a reflected language not only for understanding the task of education, becoming human, being human, and transformations as humans but also for empirical research regarding the extent to which education (e.g. for self-determination and co-determination) is possible to practise within a given policy system. In extension, non-affirmative education theory offers an analytical lens for working with curriculum development and policy. Operating with this lens recommends us to view the notions of *recognition* and *affirmation* as distinct from each other. Schools need to *recognise* curricular aims and content, but to what extent are they allowed not to affirm these aims and contents with pedagogical motives? To *affirm* them would mean not to problematise these aims and contents *with* students, thereby risking reducing education to naïve transmission of given values and contents. Not affirming these aims and contents does not mean denying their truth or relevance but working with them to create a *pedagogical space* for the student or pupil. These pedagogical spaces allow for critical reflection on the meaning and value of phenomena. These constructed spaces are invitations for discerning thought and experimental practice, asking how knowledge relates to value and how given knowledge may solve urgent problems in society, but also reflecting on whose interest knowledge is developed. Non-affirmative educational teaching is a way to promote and reflect on such reflective and experimental pedagogical spaces. Embracing a non-teleological view where the shape of the future depends on how we, and future generations, act ourselves is an education of hope but also an education that emphasises ethical awareness and responsibility in many different ways. A fresh take on non-affirmative theory offers us a language of education coherent with critical humanism connected with a cosmopolitan gaze, the approach conceptualises a recognition-aware and multi-generational but non-affirmative understanding of sustainable education.

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