

1

Educational Leadership for What? An Educational Examination

Gert Biesta

Introduction: Educational Leadership for What?

If it is granted that educational leaders should lead, then the obvious question is what they should lead *for*—which can also be phrased as the question what they should lead *towards*. Although the question seems obvious, it is easily forgotten in the maelstrom educational leaders find themselves in, being caught up with administration and management rather than leadership, and often just trying to keep up with bureaucratic demands and desires. This means that the question of direction, the question what educational leadership ought to be *for*, is often only answered in the concrete and short-term language of targets, outcomes, and Key Performance Indicators, with little attention and often simply just not enough time for considering the longer-term aims of education and the underlying purposes that direct, give meaning, and justify such aims. Also, in the world of targets and Key Performance Indicators it is quite likely that the answer to what educational leaders should lead for is already decided for them, with little scope for interpretation and negotiation, let alone for critique.

Yet the relative absence of sustained attention to questions of purpose is not just a practical matter; it is not just a matter of lack of time, but also has to do with the presence within educational policy, practice, and its wider discourse, of powerful but nonetheless rather unhelpful ideas, theories, framings, and assumptions of what education is about, what the task of education supposedly is, of how education works, and what this means for the administration, leadership, and improvement of education. The purpose of this chapter is not to provide a detailed overview of all these discussions, but—one step removed from this—raise a number of more fundamental questions about education, including questions of its discourse, its purposes, its theories, and its improvement. The intent partly is to have a perspective from which problems can be identified and can appear as problems, and partly to provide building blocks for a more informed, nuanced, and politically astute discussion about education and its leadership.

The chapter is structured in the following way. I begin where many would argue education should begin, that is with the question of learning, but I will argue that learning—and specifically the language of learning—has become a problem for education rather than just its obvious starting point and frame of reference. From here, I address the question of purpose in education, suggesting that, unlike what is the case in

many other domains of human practice, the question of educational purpose is a multidimensional question, which raises some particular issues for the conduct of, and research about, education. These issues, as I will discuss, call for pragmatism at all levels of education, where pragmatism means that the question about what ought to be done can only ever be answered in relation to what it is we seek to bring about or let emerge. This also has to do with our understanding of the dynamics of education—the question of how education “works.” Although there can be no doubt that education does work and should work, much of what is being discussed in relation to this starts from quasi-causal assumptions about the dynamics of educational processes and practices—assumptions that also play a key role in discussions about educational effectiveness. As an alternative to quasi-causal thinking about education, which actually is a cause of many practical and political problems in education, including in the domain of educational leadership, I suggest a complexity-oriented approach, which not only provides a more accurate account of the dynamics of education but also provides a significantly different way into questions about educational change and improvement. In the final section of the chapter I bring these threads together in a discussion about the position of the school in contemporary society, arguing that in an “impulse society” (Roberts, 2014) there is an important duty for schools to resist (Meirieu, 2007) rather than just satisfy the desires that societies project onto their schools.

The Learnification of Education

It seems obvious to start any discussion about education with the question of learning, and many would indeed argue that education is “all about learning,” even to the point that education without learning—or in my own phrase: education *beyond* learning (Biesta, 2006)—remains an option that not many would immediately want to consider. As one of the editors of this handbook formulated it recently: “(W)hat underlies and distinguishes educational ideas is that in each and every case, *learning must happen*” (Bogotch, 2016, p.1; emphasis added). While I still consider it important to consider the possibilities of education beyond learning, also in order to free teaching from learning and to free teaching from the politics of learning (Biesta, 2013; 2015a; on learning see also Stables, 2005), the point I wish to discuss in this section does not so much concern learning itself as its *discourse* and the ways in which this discourse has influenced (and in my view: distorted) thinking and acting in education.

The starting point here is the (remarkable) rise of the language of learning in education over the past two decades or so (which is not to suggest that learning was not part of the educational conversation before, but had a different position and status in the discourse). The rise of this “new language of learning” (Biesta, 2006; Haugsbakk & Nordkvelle, 2007) is visible in a number of discursive shifts, such as the tendency to refer to pupils, students, children, and even adults as learners; to redefine teaching as facilitating learning, creating learning opportunities, or delivering learning experiences; or to talk about the school as a learning environment or place for learning. The new language of learning is also visible in the ways in which adult education has been transformed into lifelong learning in many countries (Field, 2000; Yang & Valdés-Cotera, 2011).

The rise of this new language of learning has to be seen as the outcome of a number of only loosely connected developments in the theory, policy, and practice of education.

These include the critique of authoritarian forms of education that focus solely on the activities of the teacher and see education ultimately as a form of control (see, e.g. Freire's critique of "banking education"; Freire, 1972); the rise of new theories of learning, particularly constructivist theories (Richardson, 2003; Roth, 2011); and also, particularly in the shift towards lifelong learning, the influence of neoliberal policies that seek to burden individuals with tasks that used to be the responsibility of governments and the state (see Olssen & Peters, 2005). The language of learning has not only dramatically affected research and policy, but has also become part of the everyday vocabulary of teachers in many countries and settings (Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2017).

What is the problem with the rise of the new language of learning in education? Perhaps the quickest way to express this is to say that the point of education is not that students learn—and it is remarkable how often this is what is being claimed in policy texts or research about what education is for, what teachers should do, and what research should investigate—but always that students learn *something*, that they learn it for particular *reasons*, and that they learn it *from someone*. Education, to put it differently, always raises questions about *content*, *purpose*, and *relationships*. The language of learning, viewed in this way and used in this way, is therefore at least *insufficient* for expressing what education is about and ought to be about. Just saying that students should learn, that teachers should make students learn or should support their learning, or that research should investigate how all kinds of factors affect student learning, simply doesn't say enough.

Learning, to put it differently, is a process concept, so that it is only when we specify the "of what" and the "for what" of learning—its content and purpose—that we begin to get into a meaningful discussion, both about learning and, more importantly, about education, where the ambition can never be that students will just "learn." A slightly different way to make the point is when we look at examples in which the word "learning" is used correctly, such as learning to ride a bike, learning that two and two equals four, learning the second law of thermodynamics, learning to be patient, learning that there are things that you are not good at, and so on—all examples of learning, and even of things that, in principle, can be learned in school, we can see that just to refer to "learning" is not enough. With this comes the fact that, at least in English language usage, learning is an individual and individualizing concept—you can only learn (for) yourself but cannot learn for someone else—which also makes the language of learning inappropriate if we wish to highlight that education is always in some way about relationships, such as the one between the student and the teacher.

There is not only a problem with the language of learning—that the language is insufficient to articulate what education is about—but also with the discourse of learning, that is, when this language becomes the main way in which educational practitioners, policy makers, and researchers speak, think, and act, as it is a language that, in itself, runs the risk of neglecting to ask the questions that ought to be asked in education about the content and purpose of learning, and about the particular relationships that are at stake in education. This is one of the main reasons why the rise of the language of learning in education is actually quite a problematic development—which was the main reason I coined a "problematic" concept for this development, namely that of "learnification" (Biesta 2010).

All this is of course not to suggest that when the only or main discourse available in education is the discourse of learning, that there is no content and no direction. On the contrary, the rise of the language of learning may have actually made it easier for particular forces to take control of what education should focus on or bring about. In this regard, it is interesting that the rise of the language of learning has coincided with the rise in education policy of a focus on a narrow set of “learning outcomes” (note the term) which, in recent years, have become the main “currency” of the global education measurement industry (Biesta 2015b). And it is not only policy who is to blame here, as the language of learning has also been promoted in research and scholarship, with a similar lack of attention to content and purpose, the “of what” and “for what” of learning. This is both the case in general scholarship on education¹ and in scholarship in the field of educational leadership, where leadership and learning are often seen as closely connected—see, for example, the occurrence of this connection in Boyle & Charles (2010), Collinson (2012), and Dempster (2012)—or the rise in leadership of the phrase “lead learner” in discussions about educational leadership.

The Question of Purpose in Education: A Threefold Issue

Having established that learning is not “enough”—that the *language* of learning is insufficient as an educational language and that the *discourse* of learning may actually distract educators from asking the questions they should be asking about their practice—the question that needs addressing, then, is what is needed to transform the language of learning into a language and discourse of education. I have suggested above that in education we always need to engage with questions of content, purpose, and relationships. Of these three, the question of purpose is the first and, in a sense, the most important question, because it is only when we have established a view about what we seek to bring about with our educational endeavors—in the broad sense of the word—that we have a criterion to make judgments about the content that is most appropriate for this and about the ways in which relationships can support our ambitions. Some authors have even gone so far as to say that the purpose is *constitutive* of education, which means that education *necessarily* needs a (sense of) purpose. In more technical terms, this means that education is a teleological practice, that is a practice constituted by a “telos”—the Greek word for the “point” and purpose of a practice (see Carr, 2003, p. 10).

There is, however, something distinctive about the question of purpose in education because, unlike what is the case in many other domains of human action, the purpose of education is not one-dimensional—there is not *one* purpose education is orientated towards—but is actually three-dimensional (and thus requires three-dimensional thinking; an issue I will discuss in more detail in the next section). The suggestion that the purpose of education is three-dimensional stems from the simple but nonetheless important observation that when we look at concrete instances of educational practice, we can find that they have a potential impact in three different domains or dimensions. What many would recognize is that education is about qualification; that it is about the transmission and acquisition of knowledge and skills. Acquiring knowledge and skills is important because it allows children, young people, and adults to “do” something—it qualifies them. This “doing” can be very specific, such as in the field of vocational and professional education, or it can be conceived of more widely, such as in general

education that seeks to prepare children and young people for their lives in complex modern societies. Some see qualification as the only task and function of the school, and assert that schools should stick to this remit. The idea that qualification is the only thing that matters and should matter in school education is also visible in much that is being measured about education, as it tends to focus on “academic” outcomes, and often only outcomes in a rather narrow domain (science, mathematics, and first language).

But even if the official discourse argues that schools ought to be only involved in qualification—in the transmission and acquisition of knowledge and skills—research on education has shown for a long time that schools are also powerful institutions of socialization, as they communicate traditions and practices and play an important role in providing opportunities for children and young people to engage with such traditions and practices. This partly happens “behind the backs” of teachers and students—as research on the hidden curriculum has shown—but is increasingly seen as a legitimate ambition of education, both in its more conservative modes, where the ambition is, for example, to communicate and preserve particular social, cultural, political or religious traditions and ways of being and doing, and in more progressive modes, where the emphasis may be on traditions of critical democratic citizenship. Socialization is therefore a second domain in which education functions.

In addition to qualification and socialization, I wish to argue that education always also affects what, in general terms, we might call the personhood of the student. And again we make a distinction between the fact that education always has such an impact and the fact that educators can actively seek to achieve such an impact, for example when they consider particular qualities that they seek to promote—such as critical thinking, a collaborative attitude, and so on. In my own work—see particularly Biesta (2010)—I have referred to this as the domain of subjectification, highlighting the fact that all education worthy of the name, that is, education that is not enacted as indoctrination, should ultimately promote the possibility for children and young people to exist as subjects of action and responsibility, rather than as objects of the intervention and control of others.

The argument I wish to put forward here is that qualification, socialization, and subjectification are more than simply three possible “effects” of education—that is, three domains in which education *functions*. I wish to suggest that because education always has a potential impact in these three domains, educators and educational leaders should also take explicit responsibility for what they seek to achieve in each of these domains (and engage with the question how their ambitions can be justified). This means that in addition to seeing them as three functions of education, we should also see qualification, socialization, and subjectification as *three domains of educational purpose*.

Two further observations are relevant for the focus of this chapter. The first is that if we see qualification, socialization, and subjectification as three legitimate domains of educational purpose, then we have a starting point for criticizing and countering trends that seek to reduce education to only one of these domains. The issue here is not only that such approaches tend to create educational systems and practices that are out of balance, but also that a one-sided emphasis can often annihilate one or more of the other domains (for an early “warning” on this problem see Kohn, 1999). Although the strongest “pushes” many educators and educational leaders are experiencing are

attempts at reducing education to qualification and, more specifically, to measurable outcomes in a small number of school subjects, we should not forget that attempts to “drive” education solely with regard to socialization or with regard to subjectification are also one-sided. Good education, therefore, should always be concerned with content, tradition(s) and the (formation of the) person. The second observation I wish to make here is that although qualification, socialization, and subjectification can be distinguished, they can never be separated. This raises some important considerations with regard to the design and conduct of education, to which I now turn.

The Need for Judgment and Pragmatism

If we look at education from the angle of purpose and acknowledge that the question of purpose poses itself as a three-dimensional or threefold question, and if we also acknowledge that the three domains are always “there” *together*, then we have a starting point for identifying the kinds of judgment required in an education that is oriented towards such a broad and encompassing conception.

First there is judgment needed about what we seek to achieve in each of the three domains and about how we can keep these domains in an educationally meaningful balance. Rather than to say that education should promote learning, the question becomes what it is we seek to achieve with regard to the qualification, socialization, and subjectification of our students. This is not just an abstract question that can be resolved at the highest level of policy and curriculum development—although it has to be taken into consideration there as well—but is also a question that poses itself again and again in the everyday practice of education and also in relation to each individual student. The need for achieving an educationally meaningful balance between the three domains introduces another moment of judgment in education, as qualification, socialization, and subjectification are not necessarily always in synergy with each other.

This means that a second judgment that needs to be made—again not only at a general level, but also in relation to each student at each point in time—is how we deal with the trade-offs between the three domains. What, in other words, are willing to give up *temporarily* in one or two of the domains in order to make something possible with regard to another domain. As educators, we know that it makes good sense to focus our educational endeavors and the efforts of our students on particular aspects of the educational spectrum—sometimes they have to focus on particular skills or knowledge; sometimes they need to focus on their relationships with fellow students. But such one-sidedness always comes at a price, so the key question is to what degree it is reasonable to limit our efforts in one or two domains in order to make something in another domain possible. It is here that we encounter a tipping point that shifts education out of balance—(and the current systematic drive on academic achievement reveals a system that runs a serious risk of being out of balance).

In addition to judgments about purpose—about the “what for”—education also requires judgments about the “how.” These are judgments about pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, classroom organization, school architecture, and so on. The reason why this requires attention as well has to do with another peculiarity of the practice of education, namely the fact that the means of education—the ways we “do” education—are not neutral “interventions” that only require a check on their effectiveness. On the contrary, the means of education themselves send important messages to our students, so

that it is never only a question of whether how we “do” education is effective with regard to what we seek to achieve or bring about, but also whether it is educationally meaningful (see Carr 1992). Students, after all, not only learn from what we say, but also—and in most cases even more—from how we do things, and many students are very good at spotting the contradictions between the two.

These considerations show the central role of judgment in teaching, and such judgments are first of all “of the teacher” (see Heilbronn, 2008) because they must be made in the always in some respect new, concrete, and unique situations teachers encounter. For educational leadership, this first of all raises the question of what needs to be done to provide teachers with the space for making such judgments—a complex question that has to do with the interaction of individual capacity, the cultures within which teachers work, and the structures that frame their work. They are questions, in other words, about what is required from those with leadership responsibility to make it possible for teachers to exercise *agency* (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015). This is not to suggest that educational leadership is only there to facilitate the agency of teachers. Questions of educational purpose also play beyond the classroom—at the level of school policy and practice—and it is here that questions of judgment and engagement with educational purpose in its threefold manifestation are also within the remit of those involved in educational leadership.

A final observation I wish to make here concerns the fact that judgments about the purposes, the forms, and the trade-offs in education have to be understood as fundamentally *pragmatic* in nature. Pragmatic here means that the question as to what to do in education and how to do it can only be answered in relation to what it is that we seek to achieve. It can only be answered, in other words, with reference to our views on the purposes of education. This is an important warning against a trend in education to make *principled* claims about what should be done—a trend that is particularly fueled by research and particularly enacted by education policy. Principled statements about education suggest that in education things should *always* be done in a particular way. We encounter such claims often in the form of educational fashions, such as current claims that all education should be flexible, personalized, focused on the student, and so on. To highlight that most if not all judgments in education are pragmatic, means to see that whether education should be flexible, personal, and student-centered always depends on what it is we seek to achieve. In some cases we may indeed conclude that flexibility or personalization are meaningful ways to design and enact education, but in other cases we may judge that this is precisely *not* what needs to happen.

The current push towards evidence-based forms of education tends to overlook this important insight in suggesting that the only consideration that should matter is “what works”—forgetting that the question “what works” is meaningless if we forget to ask what something is supposed to work *for* (Bogotch, Mirón, & Biesta, 2007), and also if we forget to ask about the way in which the “how” of education itself crucially contributes to what it is we seek to achieve.²

How Does Education Work, and How Can It Work Better?

In the previous sections I have outlined that if we wish to move “beyond learning” in our thinking and speaking about, and doing of, education, we need to engage explicitly with the question of the purpose of our educational activities and endeavors. While I do not

wish to determine what the purpose or purposes of such endeavors should be, I have indicated three domains that are always “at stake” in education and that all education in some way needs to attend to. Looking at education in this way also begins to highlight the particular judgments that are required in the design and enactment of education—judgments that are at the heart of the daily work of teachers and that also occupy an important position in the work of those with a leadership responsibility. All this also provides a framing for the critical analysis of the all-too-easy solutions that some researchers and some policy makers (and some practitioners too) seek to generate, implement and adopt: solutions that are based on the assumption that if we have robust scientific knowledge about the relationship between educational inputs, mediating factors, and educational outcomes, we can reduce the need for difficult judgments about the complexities of education, including value-laden judgments about what education is supposed to be *for*. One thing I have tried to argue is that the complex, open character of education and the need for judgment are not the result of a lack of knowledge—such that with more investment in research we could eventually “close” education and take judgment out—but rather belong to the very qualities that make education *educational*.

There are two further aspects I would like to add to the discussion so far before I draw my conclusion about the meaning of the approach presented in this chapter for the field of educational leadership. The issue I wish to explore briefly in this section has to do with the question of how education “works” and with common assumptions about the workings of education—assumptions that, in my view, tend to generate quite unhelpful questions, expectations, research agendas, policy initiatives, and interventions. What I have in mind here is what I refer to as quasi-causal assumptions about the workings of education, that is, assumptions that tend to depict education in terms of inputs, mediating factors, and outputs or outcomes. Whereas I don’t think that many would argue for perfect causality in education—where teaching is seen as the cause of learning and where good, effective or perfect teaching would produce predictable learning outcomes—there seems to be, nonetheless, a not-uncommon expectation in research, policy, and practice that education roughly works in this way (hence, for example, the ongoing appeal of the phrase “what works” in many corners of education).

I have found it useful to approach the question of how education works in terms of insights from complexity theory and systems theory (see, for example, Osberg & Biesta, 2010). One thing that such a perspective allows us to do, is to ask the question about the conditions under which perfect causality actually occurs. The answer to this question is that perfect causality actually only happens in closed systems within which interactions between elements work in deterministic and non-recursive ways. This already begins to show why causal expectations about education are problematic, as education is best understood as an open system, a system that is in interaction with its environment, and as a system where the interactions are not deterministic but semiotic (much in education happens through communication and interpretation), and where these interactions are recursive (which basically means that the “elements” in the system—teachers and students—can think and make up their own mind and can adjust their actions based on the conclusions they draw).

To argue that education should be understood as an open, semiotic, and recursive system, begins to raise the question of how anything in education can “work” at all. After all, if education systems are open to outside influences, based on ongoing processes of mutual interpretation, and populated with people who can think and make up

their own mind, it seems to be highly unlikely that such systems will operate in predictable ways. But here, again, thinking about education as an open, semiotic, recursive system is useful, as it can generate a fairly precise answer to the question what needs to be done to make open, semiotic, and recursive systems such as education behave in more structured and predictable ways, as this requires that one begins to reduce the openness of such systems, begins to limit opportunities for interpretation, and begins to reduce the recursivity of the system—that is, the ways in which actors are free to act in any way they want. Interestingly, this is precisely what is done in education. We reduce the openness of education systems by organizing education within buildings (schools), classrooms, age groups, cohorts and so on. We reduce interpretation through the combined “work” of curriculum—which offers “material” for interpretation—and assessment—which specifies the boundaries of what makes sense and what doesn’t make sense—and, through processes that are partly still in need of further investigation, we manage to let even very young children understand what it means to act as pupils, just as, through teacher education, we work with teachers to develop their understanding of what their role involves, thus framing their thinking and, through this, their acting.

When we reduce the degrees of openness, interpretation, and recursivity of the educational system, it begins to behave in more predictable ways, even giving us the impression that the relationships between teaching and student action are more or less causal. Complexity theory and systems theory provide explanations as to why this may seem so, and what needs to be done to make education systems more predictable. These same approaches can also help to understand where, as a result of the ongoing reduction of complexity, education systems reach a point where they are no longer educational, no longer orientated towards the subject-ness of students, but become systems of indoctrination and control, where the links to the environment are shut off, where only one interpretation is considered to be right, and where we try to limit people’s own thinking, sense making, and acting.

I offer these thoughts as an alternative way of understanding the dynamics of education, other than the quasi-causal way of thinking that continues to dominate educational thought, policy and practice. I also find it interesting that the approach presented here indicates quite different drivers for change in education. The approach highlights what can be done to make education systems behave in more predictable ways and also shows the price of such interventions, as they always tend to involve a reduction of openness, interpretation, and thinking. In some cases this may be important, particularly if the task of a particular educational endeavor is for students to get it absolutely right—think of the education of airline pilots, for example. But if it is granted that education is never just about training in the domain of qualification, but also carries a responsibility for helping students to act in thoughtful and responsible ways (subjectification) in relation to existing practices, cultures, and traditions (socialization), making education “work” immediately becomes a much more complicated question.

The Duty to Resist

The thrust of the argument throughout this chapter has been that education cannot avoid normative questions, question about value, about desirable directions for education, and desirable ways of designing and enacting education. On the one hand, the implication

of my argument so far is that such normative questions are an essential part of education, and I would contend that in a democratic society there should be an ongoing open discussion about the values that should orient decisions about the direction, content, and form of education. have suggested that all education worthy of the name—that is education that does not conceive of itself as indoctrination—needs to be concerned with the qualification of students, their socialization—the ways in which they orient themselves in relation to existing cultures, traditions, and practices—and their subjectification, that is, the ways in which they can exist as independent, responsible, and responsive human beings.

This argument identifies the domains that those working in and for education need to take into consideration, but it says little about the actual choices to be made in each of these domains and the domains together. But the “says little” does indicate that it says something, namely that education is not the same as indoctrination, and that it ultimately needs to support the possibilities for students to be subjects of their own—individual and joint—actions, rather than remaining objects of the actions and interventions of others. One could say—and this is the position I would like to defend—that for education to be *educational* it needs to be concerned with the possibilities for students to exist as subjects rather than objects. There are, of course, complicated questions about what it means to exist as a subject and what that requires, just as there are complicated and important questions about why existing as a subject is desirable. The latter question can in my view only be engaged with from a historical perspective, that is, with reference to those situations where the possibility for individuals to exist as a subject was suppressed, up to and including the annihilation of other human beings. This, so we might say, is the injunction of “education after Auschwitz” (Adorno), and at least poses a reference point which all those engaged in education need to take into consideration.

I propose that there is a distinctive educational interest and that schools, if they want to be institutions of education rather than of training and instruction, need to stand for this particular interest. From here it follows that the school can never just be understood as a function of society, that is, the institution that simply does everything society (or groups within society) wants it to do. As an educational institution, we might say that schools and those working in schools, leaders included, always have a duty to critically examine all the demands and desires that society puts to them, and that they need to examine these demands and desires from the perspective of their educative responsibility. The school, from this perspective, is therefore not just *functional* for society, but also has a duty to resist, as the French educational scholar Philippe Meirieu formulates it (Meirieu, 2007), and in this regard is also a fundamentally *dysfunctional* institution (a point made by the German educational scholar Klaus Mollenhauer; see Mollenhauer, 1973). The school’s duty to resist, on the ground of its responsibility for the possibility for students to exist as subjects rather than objects, also extends to the desires that students (and their parents) bring to the school. Again, if those in schools take their educational responsibilities seriously, they cannot treat students (and their parents) as mere customers whose wishes have to be obeyed. There again there is a task to resist such wishes and desires, and at least offer students (and perhaps also their parents) the opportunity to examine and, where needed, transform their desires so that their existence in the world as subjects of action and responsibility remains or becomes possible.

Conclusion: Educational Leadership for What?

I return to the question in the title of this chapter—the question of what educational leadership should be for. I do not claim that the question in itself is new or unique, but what I have tried to show in this chapter is that common ways of answering—such as that educational leadership is ultimately there to promote learning, to lead teachers in this task, to make the educational endeavor more effective in doing so and, through all this, serve society and the wider “clientele” of education—may be limited in outlook, often because they accept a prevailing “common sense” about education (such as that education is all about learning, that improvement of education means making it more effective, or that education needs to serve its customers). Ultimately educational leaders are free to answer so, just as long as they provide sound rationales for their judgments, decisions, and actions. In this chapter I have suggested that, in addition to the need for remaining critical of the powerful discourses that currently engulf education, it may be that education has a particular interest to stand for, a particular interest to defend. This educational interest in the possibility for children and young people to exist as responsible subjects of their own actions may be something that educational leaders need to take into consideration when they seek to formulate their own answers to the question of what it is they should lead *for*.

Notes

- 1 I leave it to the reader to explore examples of “learnification” in research, policy, and practice, but cannot resist one salient example, that of “deep learning,” now being promoted by the New Pedagogies for Deep Learning Partnership (see <http://npdl.global>). For example: “We work alongside educators to change the role of teachers to that of activators of learning who design learning experiences that build on learner strengths and needs, create new knowledge using real-life problem solving and help all students identify their talents, purpose and passion.”
- 2 To say, for example, that homework is of no use—a claim apparently supported by research, as reported by Hattie (2008)—is a meaningless statement if we do not specify what it is not useful *for*. And while there may be no positive evidence that homework impacts significantly on academic achievement (which could also be because there may not be meaningful research available), this does not mean that we should just abolish it, because it could well be that homework has significance and meaning for other domains of educational purpose. After all, to make students responsible for a task outside of the controlling gaze of the teacher may be very important if we want to help them to become responsible subjects, rather than being entirely driven and controlled from the outside and thus remaining objects. In this sense, I am surprised by Hattie’s suggestion—partly made in response to my critique of evidence-based education (Biesta, 2007)—that, although there is more to education than academic achievement, in the end it is what matters most (Hattie, 2008, pp. 245–255), thus reinforcing a one-dimensional view of education in which only qualification seems to count.

References

- Biesta, G. J. J. (2006). *Beyond Learning. Democratic Education for a Human Future*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Biesta, G. J. J. (2007). Why “what works” won’t work. Evidence-based practice and the democratic deficit of educational research. *Educational Theory*, 57(1), 1–22.
- Biesta, G. J. J. (2010). *Good Education in an Age of Measurement: Ethics, Politics, Democracy*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Biesta, G. J. J. (2013). Interrupting the politics of learning. *Power and Education*, 5(1), 4–15.
- Biesta, G. J. J. (2015a). Freeing teaching from learning: Opening up existential possibilities in educational relationships. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 34(3), 229–243.
- Biesta, G. J. J. (2015b). Resisting the seduction of the global education measurement industry: Notes on the social psychology of PISA. *Ethics and education*, 10(3), 348–360.
- Biesta, G. J. J., Priestley, M., & Robinson, S. (2017). Talking about education: Exploring the significance of teachers’ vocabularies for teacher agency. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 49(1), 38–54.
- Bogotch, I. (2016). Introduction: What and where is education today? A leadership perspective. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 19(1), 1–4.
- Bogotch, I., Mirón, L., & Biesta, G. (2007). “Effective for What; Effective for Whom?” Two questions SESI should not ignore. In T. Townsend (Ed.), *International Handbook of School Effectiveness and School Improvement* (pp. 93–110). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Boyle, W. F. & Charles, M. (2010). Leading learning through assessment for learning? *School Leadership & Management*, 30(3), 285–300.
- Carr, D. (2003) *Making Sense of Education. An Introduction to the Philosophy and Theory of Education and Teaching*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Collinson, V. (2012). Leading by learning, learning by leading. *Professional Development in Education*, 38(2), 247–266.
- Dempster, N. (2012). Principals leading learning: Developing and applying a leadership framework. *Education 3–13*, 40(1), 49–62.
- Field, J. (2000). *Lifelong Learning and the New Educational Order*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham.
- Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin.
- Hattie, J. (2008). *Visible Learning. A Synthesis of over 800 Meta-analyses Relating to Achievement*. London: Routledge.
- Haugsbakk, G. & Nordkvelle, Y. (2007). The rhetoric of ICT and the new language of learning. A critical analysis of the use of ICT in the curricular field. *European Educational Research Journal*, 6(1), 1–12.
- Heilbronn, R. (2008). *Teacher Education and the Development of Practical Judgement*. London: Continuum.
- Kohn, A. (1999). The costs of overemphasizing achievement. *School Administrator*, 56(10), 40–42; 44–46.
- Meirieu, P. (2007). *Pédagogie: Le devoir de résister*. [Education: The Duty to Resist.] Issy-les-Moulineaux: ESF éditeur.
- Mollenhauer, K. (1973). *Erziehung und Emanzipation*. 6. Auflage. [Education and Emancipation. 6th edition.] München: Juventa.

- Olssen, M. & Peters, M. A. (2005). Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy: from the free market to knowledge capitalism. *Journal of Education Policy*, 20(3), 313–345.
- Osberg, D. C. & Biesta, G. J. J. (Eds.) (2010). *Complexity Theory and the Politics of Education*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Priestley, M., Biesta, G. J. J., & Robinson, S. (2015). *Teacher Agency: An Ecological Approach*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Richardson, V. (2003). Constructivist pedagogy. *Teachers College Record*, 105(9), 1623–1640.
- Roberts, P. (2014). *The Impulse Society. What Is Wrong With Getting What We Want?* London: Bloomsbury.
- Roth, W.-M. (2011). *Passability: At the Limits of the Constructivist Metaphor*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Stables, A. (2005). *Living and Learning as Semiotic Engagement: A New Theory of Education*. Lewiston, NY: Mellen Press.
- Yang, J. & Valdés-Cotera, R. (Eds.) (2011). *Conceptual Evolution and Policy Developments in Lifelong Learning*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.

