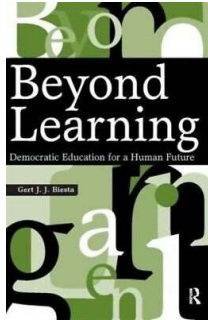


FROM LEARNING TO TEACHING – A NECESSARY SHIFT

Gert Biesta



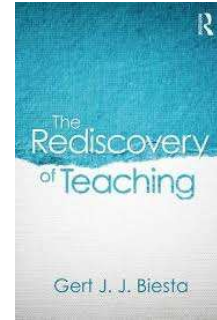
2006

MANY THANKS FOR THE INVITATION

SOME REFLECTIONS ON
LEARNING AND ITS PROBLEMS



THE NEED FOR A
RE(DIS)COVERY OF TEACHING



2017

Gesellschaft für Bildung und Wissen - Augsburg 13 April 2024



1

DIDACTOPHOBIA: THE FEAR OF TEACHING (1)

A THEME WITH A LONG HISTORY



SOCRATES: “I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think.”

SOCRATIC TEACHING



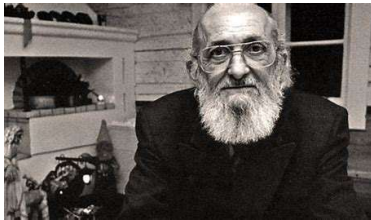
teaching through questioning

but Socrates leads his students
to inevitable conclusions

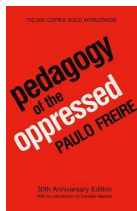
Just instruction under another name?

2

DIDACTOPHOBIA: THE FEAR OF TEACHING (2)

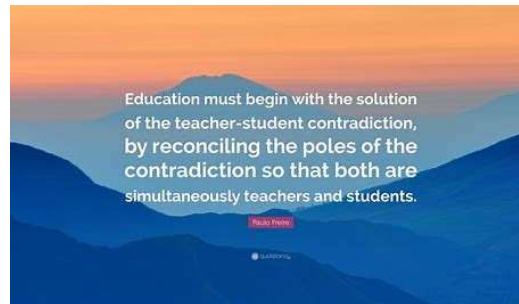


Paulo Freire (1921-1997)



Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970)

↓
a critique of
'banking
education'



education must begin with solving
the teacher-student contradiction

3

DIDACTOPHOBIA: THE FEAR OF TEACHING (3)

ANTI-PÄDAGOGIK



THE FEAR OF EDUCATION ALTOGETHER



Von Braunmühl's
**Anti-pädagogik: Studien
zur Abschaffung der
Erziehung** (1975)



4

THE (PROBLEMATIC) RETURN OF DIDACTOPHILIA



(1) “All students can learn **when taught correctly.**”

(2) “All teachers can be successful, given **effective teaching materials and presentation techniques.**”

it's nice to be explicit, but only in those cases
where teachers already know where students should end up
and students already know what teachers are talking about

but teaching is ‘double-truth giving’ (Kierkegaard)
giving students the truth **AND** the conditions
under which they can recognise it as true

5

THE ISSUE: TEACHING AS CONTROL

WHICH IS EITHER SEEN AS THE POINT OF EDUCATION

the effective production of measurable learning outcomes
the effective production of obedient identities

OR AS THE THING EDUCATION SHOULD NOT AIM FOR



because educators should be interested in the freedom of their students

DIDACTOPHILIA IS ONLY A LIMIT CASE OF EDUCATION

DIDACTOPHOBIA IS
AN UNDERSTANDABLE RESPONSE
TO TEACHING AS CONTROL

BUT NOT WITHOUT PROBLEMS

6

THE BABY AND THE BATHWATER

the main response to teaching as control
has been to turn to learners and their learning



the 'learnification' of education

student → learner; school → learning environment
class → learning community; teacher → facilitator of learning
adult education → lifelong learning

the gradual 'disappearance of teachers and teaching

from the 'sage on the stage' to the 'guide on the side'
to the 'peer at the rear'

BUT IS TEACHING CONTROL AND LEARNING FREEDOM ?

the remarkable absence of a third option
to reposition teaching on the side of
emancipation and freedom

7

THE GESTURE OF LEARNING

there are many problems with the learnification of education
such as a disregard for questions about the purposes of education

a more 'fundamental' issue is how the 'logic' of learning
positions the individual in relation to the world



the world as an object of my learning
the world as an object of my sense-making
the world as an object of my understanding
having my perspective on the world
having my opinion about the world
having my view on the world

the (problematic) 'freedom of signification' (Emmanuel Levinas)
"As if the world is just waiting for our opinion."

8

THE LIMITS OF UNDERSTANDING



Just because I don't
care doesn't mean I
don't understand.
- Homer Simpson

the world is not (just)
an object for my sense-making

a plant is not interested in and not
affected by my understanding

but asks something of me

and so with animals and other beings,
including human beings

9

A DIFFERENT GESTURE

NOT FROM ME TO THE WORLD

How can I learn, make sense, understand, comprehend, and so on?

BUT FROM THE WORLD TO ME



What is this asking of me?

A QUESTION THAT INTERRUPTS THE FREEDOM OF SIGNIFICATION
and puts my self 'at stake'



A MATTER OF EMANCIPATION

as it is for me to respond, which no one else can do for me
a different freedom: "doing what no one else can do in my place"

10

SO WHAT, THEN, ABOUT TEACHING?

What 'is' teaching? A question of definition?



Klaus Prange (1939-2019)

↓
What comes into view, when we focus on the unique and distinctive form of teaching?

ZEIGEN → POINTING & SHOWING



“Die Kunst der Umlenkung des Blicks”
THE ART OF REDIRECTING SOMEONE'S ATTENTION

“Wenn es das Zeigen nicht gibt, dann auch keine Erziehung.”

11

THE DOUBLE CHARACTER OF POINTING

pointing (out) [1] something to [2] someone
not 'Look there!' but 'You, look there!'

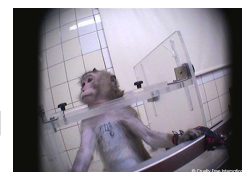
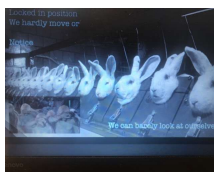
It calls someone to attend to something

THE TRIADIC STRUCTURE OF EDUCATION
teacher – the one being taught – the 'theme'

TEACHING FOCUSES ATTENTION AND DEMANDS ATTENTION

↓
**BUT IT CANNOT ENFORCE
OR CONTROL ATTENTION**

← not even like this →
[but see eye tracking research]



12

'TEACHERLY POINTING' POINTS AT FREEDOM

IT CALLS STUDENTS TO THEIR OWN ATTENTION

this is not the (post)modern 'freedom of signification'
this is not the neo-liberal 'freedom of shopping'

but the freedom to attend to the world
and figure out what the world may be asking of you
a 'difficult freedom' (Levinas): "doing what only I can do"

A POSSIBLE 'PEDAGOGY OF ATTENTION'

↓
bringing the student to attention
paying attention with intellectual humility
coming to discernment



Simone Weil 1909-1943

13

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE 'THIRD ELEMENT'

in a dyadic 'staging' of education
the teacher is always in a difficult position

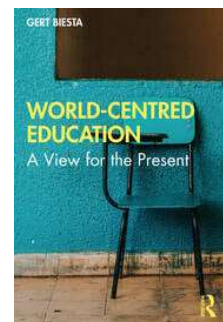
↓
becomes either an 'authority figure'
(the one who is after control)

or a 'facilitator of learning'
(the one who has nothing to give)

in a triadic 'staging' of education
teacher and student are both attending to 'something'

↓
THE WORLD

'AUTHORITY' COMES FROM THIS 'SOMETHING'



2021

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OVERCOMING THE FEAR OF TEACHING

beyond teaching as control
we find teaching as the invitation
to come into a relationship
with the authority of the world

TEACHING FOR WHICH WE SHOULDN'T BE AFRAID
TEACHING THAT SHOULD COME TO AN END



“Every teacher must learn how to stop teaching, when the time comes. That is a difficult art. Only a few are able, when the time is right, to allow reality to take their place.”

Bertolt Brecht

15

THEREFORE . . .



16

THANKS FOR YOUR ATTENTION



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