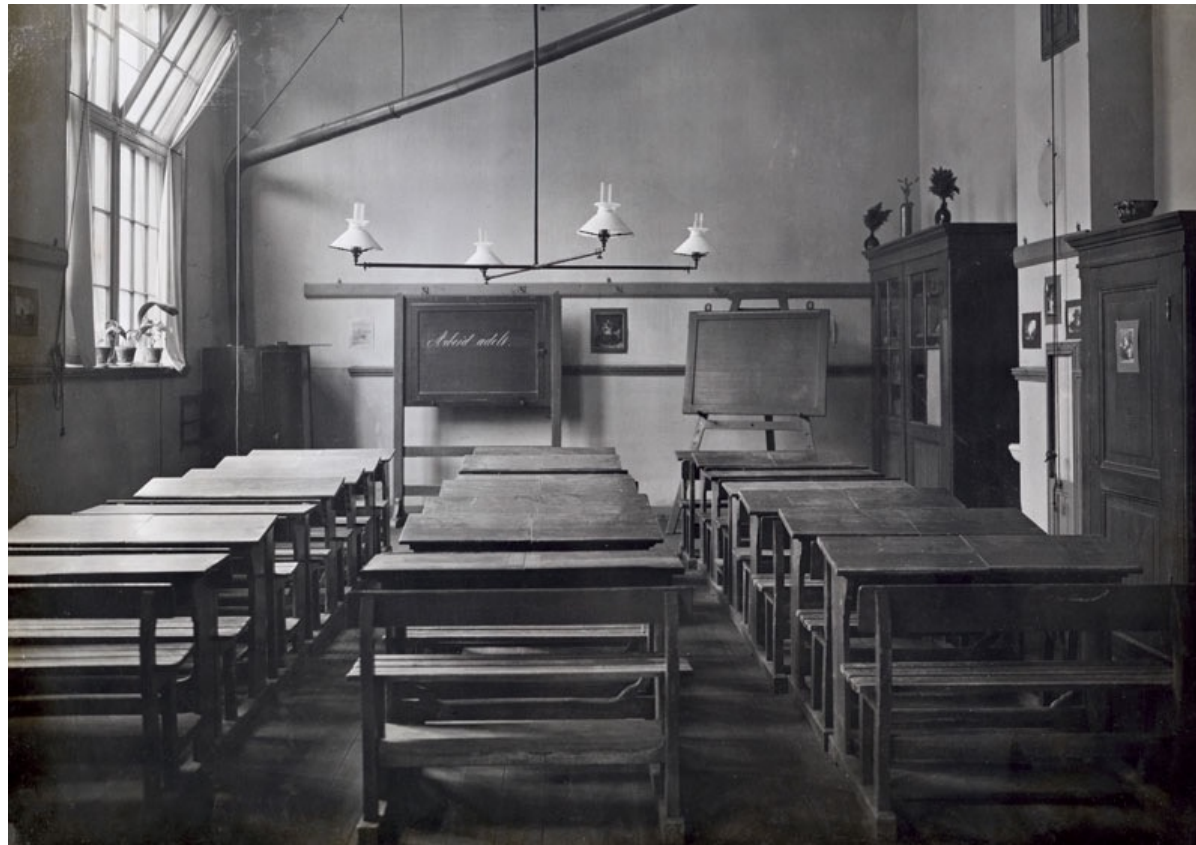


WORLD-CENTRED EDUCATION: FROM CREATIVITY TO SENSITIVITY

[on what we should not forget about art and education]

Gert Biesta

Maynooth University, Ireland & University of Edinburgh, UK



MANY THANKS FOR THE INVITATION

these are **unfamiliar times** in which we are challenged to find a way ‘forward’

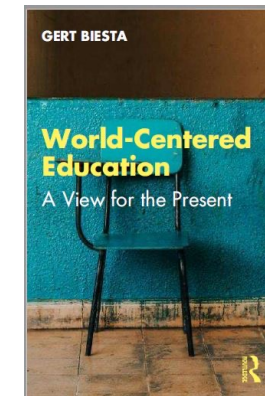
in many cases ‘we’ still do this from a **relatively privileged position**
which means that I keep reminding myself to **keep things in perspective**



perhaps what I’m asking in this presentation is whether we can keep **the work of education and the work of the arts** connected to the ongoing challenge of **“trying to be at home in the world”** (Hannah Arendt)



an existential perspective
↓
world-centred education



SOME CONCERNS & IDEAS ABOUT ART AND EDUCATION

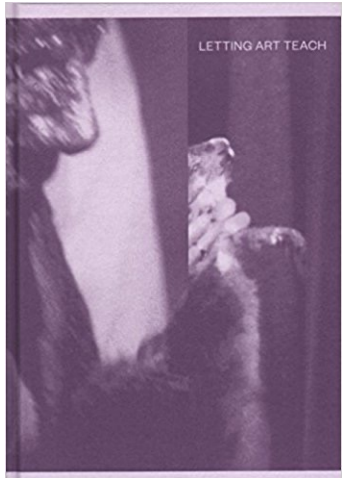
I do this **in response** to things I see happening
in discussions about the arts and education
in a number of different countries

e.g., a proposal for a new curriculum framework in the Netherlands
the arts approached in terms of **'thinking strategies'** and **'making strategies'**
[which sounds fine for 'design and technology' but not for the arts]

I find a lot of what I read about art and education
uninteresting, educationally problematic, and often not about art

which is also why I wrote a little book
Letting art Teach (2017) – *Lad Kunst Undervise* (2022)

2 MAIN CONCERNS



[1] THE DISAPPEARANCE OF ART from art education

instrumental justifications for art in the curriculum:

'ART IS USEFUL'

because it drives up test scores in . . . language, maths and science
because it promotes the development of . . . creativity, morality, pro-social attitudes,
the brain, empathy, 21st century skills, wellbeing, and so on



**making a case for art in education,
but not really caring about art
'anything that does the trick will do'**

also revealing curricular and societal hierarchies

Where's the research that shows that doing mathematics
makes children better musicians?

What's the alternative?



**non-instrumental justifications? art for art's sake?
art education as fundamentally useless!**

A CATEGORY MISTAKE



asking for the usefulness frames education as the production of things
achievement, learning outcomes, test results, and so on

the educated person is not a thing
but a human being with an 'altered outlook'

not asking what education makes, but what it makes *possible*

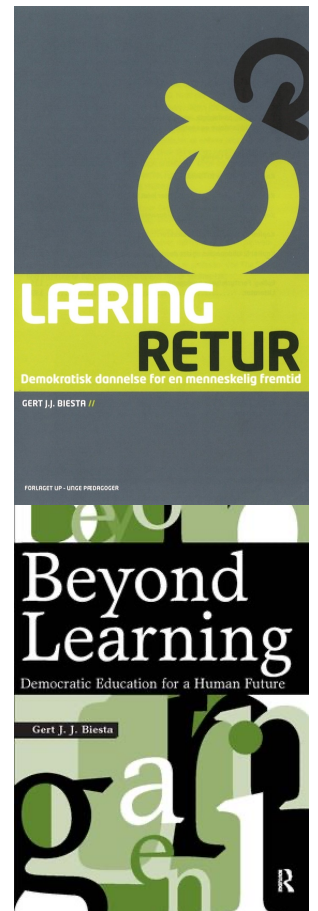


opening up existential possibilities

different ways of being – different ways of existing – existing differently
including existential possibilities 'beyond learning'

The Rediscovery of Teaching (2017)

Beyond Learning (2006)



[2] THE DISAPPEARANCE OF EDUCATION from art education

the rise of extreme curriculum-centred conceptions of education
schools as 'exam factories'



focus on the production of a small set of pre-defined 'learning outcomes'
(‘academic achievement’ & particular identities)
‘supported’ by the global education measurement industry

becomes a problem when students start to disappear as subjects
and become objects to be trained, modelled and measured

inclusion of the arts as a way to counter these trends



to allow children/students to express their voice, make their own sense,
be creative, generate their own meaning, articulate their own unique identity

the potential of the arts to re-centre education
away from the curriculum towards the child/student

BUT WHAT IF?

the problem with educational expressivism



What if the voice is racist?

What if creativity is destructive?

What if identity is ego-centric?

THE EDUCATIONAL WORK

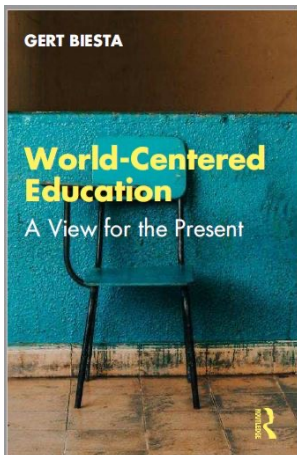


not to suppress expression, also not just let expression 'arrive'
but bring what or who expresses itself into dialogue with the world
in order to figure out whether what is arriving will help or hinder
with living one's life well, together with others, here and now



“arousing the desire for wanting to exist in the world in a grown-up way”

not curriculum-centred, not child-centred, but world-centred



THE EDUCATIONAL QUESTION IS AN EXISTENTIAL QUESTION

NOT THE QUESTION WHO WE ARE
or how we become who we are



IDENTITY

BUT THE QUESTION HOW WE ARE
how we try to live our lives, how we try to exist

what we will do with how we have become, with our identity,
with what we have learned, with our capacities and competences
but also with our inabilities, blind spots, and incompetences



SUBJECT-NESS

existing as subject, not object

“EXISTING IN THE WORLD . . .”

encountering resistance (material, social):
shows that the world is real and not a construction

three possible responses

[a] trying to overcome what offers resistance: leads to **world-destruction**

[b] shying away from what offers resistance: leads to **self-destruction**



two places of non-being – of non-existence

[c] staying in the middle ground ‘between’ world-destruction and self-destruction

a place of dialogue – not as conversation, but as existential ‘form’

staying with who or what is other: a lifelong challenge



a worldly space – an educational space

because it is a space that teaches you something (e.g., that you are not alone)

ART IS THIS NEVER-ENDING DIALOGUE

“... IN A GROWN-UP WAY”

not the outcome of a developmental trajectory but a way of existing



“being in the world without being in the centre of the world” (Philippe Meirieu)

THE EDUCATIONAL QUESTION

“Is what I desire desirable – for my own life, my life with others, on this planet?”



this question always manifests itself as an interruption

of desires, of being-with-oneself, of identity, of the natural and social order

not suppressing our desires, but examining, selecting, rearranging and transforming,

so that they can sustain a grown-up way of being in the world

particularly important in a world/time that only wants us to desire more

ART IS THE TRANSFORMATIVE EXPLORATION OF OUR DESIRES

THE EDUCATIONAL WORK [1]: INTERRUPTION

interruption of desires, of being with oneself,
of identity, of the natural and the social order



by introducing resistance into the life of the child/student

AN ENCOUNTER WITH WHAT IS REAL

(an instrument, a composition, your body, a text, paint, stone, and so on)

not any interruption is educational (e.g. direct moral education)

the educational interruption is aimed at grown-up existence



opening up a space in which the I can step forward

Homer Lane: "Do you want to break my watch as well?"

Jacques Rancière: "Denying students the satisfaction of not being a subject."

THIS IS AN EQUALISING GESTURE: EVERYONE IS CALLED TO BE AN I

THE EDUCATIONAL WORK [2]: SUSPENSION

making time, providing space and creating forms for meeting the world,
and meeting ourselves and our desires in relation to the world
and 'work through' all this

two 'champions' of suspending education



Janusz Korczak
A.S. Neill



'schole' as time made free for this

THE EDUCATIONAL WORK [3]: SUSTENANCE

support for staying in the difficult middle ground
showing that what is difficult now may, in the longer term,
be the more desirable option

THE ART OF EDUCATION



THE EXISTENTIAL WORK OF THE ARTS IN EDUCATION

INTERRUPTION?

ART INTERRUPTS!

SUSPENSION?

ART SUSPENDS!

SUSTENANCE?

ART SUSTAINS!

THE EQUALISING WORK OF THE ARTS

IS ALL THIS A MATTER OF UNDERSTANDING?

[1] understanding as sense-making

What does this mean? How can I make sense of this?

art as sense making & education as making sense of art?

**BUT SOMETIMES ART DOESN'T MAKE SENSE
AND SOMETIMES LIFE DOESN'T MAKE SENSE**

[2] understanding as “an unending activity by which, in constant change and variation, we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in the world” (Hannah Arendt)

from How can I make sense of? How can I learn from?
to What is this asking of me? What is this trying to say to me?
What is this trying to teach me?



AROUSING A SENSITIVITY FOR THE WORLD



TO SUM UP

a different way to think (about) art and education
that doesn't reduce art to an educational instrument
but approaches art existentially
as the ongoing exploration of what it means to exist in the world
that doesn't reduce education to learning
but puts the existential question at its centre
"What is this asking of me?"
and that doesn't reduce art education to expression or creativity
but provides an opening for art to do its 'teacherly' work



LETTING ART TEACH

THANK YOU

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