Risking ourselves in education: Qualification, socialisation and subjectification revisited
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Introduction
Homer Lane (1875-1925) is one of the little-known figures in the history of 20th century education. I had never heard of Lane until I came across him in the writings of A.S. Neill, founder of Summerhill school. Interestingly, Neill actually refers to Lane as "the most influential factor" in his life.[1] Being a fan of Neill, I became curious about Lane and his 'Little Commonwealth,' the residential school based on democratic principles of participation and self-governance which he set up and ran in rural Dorset, England, from 1913 to 1918. There isn't a lot of literature about Lane and his school,[2] and Lane himself also wrote very little. The only account he gave of his educational ideas is in a short book called *Talks to Parents and Teachers*, published in 1928.[3]

Lane set up his school in order to give young boys and girls with 'difficult' backgrounds (in most cases criminal convictions) a second, and sometimes third or fourth chance. He did not do this through discipline, behavioural management or a strict regime of 're-education,' but through freedom. Instead of taking his students' freedom *away*, he actually returned their freedom to them, so to speak, in the hope that they would reconnect with their freedom and make it into their 'own' freedom. From a more conventional view of education, Lane took quite a lot of risks with his approach and there are numerous stories of young people running away from the school and getting into trouble in the nearby village. But there are also examples of the opposite.

In one of the chapters of *Talks to Teachers and Parents*, entitled 'Misconceptions of Power,'[4] Lane writes about an encounter over tea with a boy of sixteen who he calls Jason; a rather 'rough' boy with a criminal record and a history of running away from the Little Commonwealth. Jason is obviously unhappy at the school, so Lane suggests that he gets some of his friends together for the next election of officers for the school, so as to be able to change things. When Jason declares that he "would just like to run the place," Lane asks him what he would do first. Not immediately sure what to say, Jason, after some looking around for clues, responds that he would like to "smash up those fussy tea-things" – the cups and saucers – as they are "for women and la-di-da boys," as he puts it, but not for boys like him. Lane responds by saying that he wants Jason to be happy and if smashing the cups and saucers would do so, he should smash them up.

In the sequence that follows, Lane describes how he provides Jason with the poker from the hearth and that Jason does indeed smash up the cup and saucer, and two more, put in front

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[1] Neill quoted in Walter H.G. Armatyge, "Psychoanalysis and Teacher Education II," *British Journal of Teacher Education 1*, no. 1 (1975): 317-334. .

[2] William David Wills, *Homer Lane: A Biography* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964); Elsie Theodora Bazeley, *Homer Lane and the Little Commonwealth* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1928).

[3] Homer Lane, *Talks to Parents and Teachers* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1928).

[4] Lane, *Talks to Parents and Teachers*, 159—169.

of him by Lane. Other boys in the room see what is happening and, interestingly, begin to accuse Lane, saying that by daring Jason to smash the cups, he is actually making him do it. Jason picks up on this by saying that actually the problem "ain't the dishes, but that you dared me to smash them."[5] The event unfolds further due to an observation made by one of the other boys in the room that the cups and saucers actually aren't Lane's but belong to the proprietors of the school, and that Lange therefore has no right offering them to Jason for smashing up. Suddenly, then, Jason becomes the hero and Lane the wrong-doer. Jason does indeed defend himself by saying that his main reason for smashing the cups and saucers was that he always takes a dare because "I'm no coward."

At that point Lane takes his watch, puts it in Jason's hand, saying: "Here's my watch, Jason. I dare you to smash it." Lane continues:

> The lad looked at the watch and glanced round at the anxious faces of his friends in indecision. After a moment his expression changed to desperation. He raised the watch as to dash it into the hearth, and glanced at me, hoping that I should at the last moment exercise authority, and so leave him falsely victorious in the possession of his cherished attitude. The moment's hesitation brought the real Jason to the surface. He lowered his hand and placed the watch on the table. "No, I won't smash your watch," he said, with an attempt at good-natured generosity to cover his embarrassment.[6]

Eventually Jason leaves the room with his friends. When he returns the following morning, he asks Lane if he can have work in the school's carpentry shop. When Lane asks why, he says, with a smile: "Oh, I've just got to earn extra money to pay for them dishes you busted last night."[7]

I recount Homer Lane's story – which he himself refers to as a "complicated and unusual incident"[8] – not because of its apparent success in 'turning around' a difficult youngster,[9] but because Lane's actions provide a vivid and rather precise example of what in my own work I have referred to as education as *subjectification*. Let me take one step back in order then to explain why Lane's story is such a telling case of this.

The three domains of education
In a number of publications, going back as far as 2004,[10] I have expressed concerns about what eventually I termed as the 'learnification' of education. This concerns the shift in educational discourse, policy and practice towards learners and their learning. This shift is

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[5] Lane, *Talks to Parents and Teachers*, 166.
[6] Lane, *Talks to Parents and Teachers*, 167—168.
[7] Lane, *Talks to Parents and Teachers*, 168.
[8] Lane, *Talks to Parents and Teachers*, 169.
[9] Lane mentions that Jason became "the best carpenter in the community," was elected judge of the school's Citizens' Court, eventually joined the army and was sadly killed in France during the war (see Lane, *Talks to Parents and Teachers*, 169).
[10] Gert Biesta, "Against Learning: Reclaiming a Language for Education in an Age of Learning," *Nordisk Pedagogik 23*, no.1 (2004): 70—82.

often presented as a response to top-down practices of education that focus on teaching, curriculum and the input-side of education more generally. The turn towards learning is also presented as a response to authoritarian practices, where education is seen as an act of control – not unlike Freire's notion of 'banking education.'[11] From that perspective the turn towards learning is seen as a progressive move where, instead of teachers and the curriculum, learners and their learning are in the centre. This way of viewing and doing education is supported by constructivist theories of learning in which it is argued that at the end of the day learners have to make up their own minds and come to their own understandings; something which teachers obviously cannot do for them.

One important aspect of my critique of the rise of the 'new language of learning' and the more general 'learnification' of education had to do with the fact that the term 'learning' is a rather empty process-term which doesn't say much – if anything at all – about what the learning is supposed to be *about* and *for*. Yet these questions are crucial for education, because the point of education is never that students simply learn – they can do that anywhere including, nowadays, on the internet – but that they learn *something*, that they learn it *for a reason*, and that they learn it *from someone*. A key problem with the language of learning is that it tends to make these questions – about educational content, purpose and relationships – invisible, or that it is assumed that the answer to these questions is already clear and decided upon.[12]

One point that particularly has gained attention in the discussion about the learnification of education, has to do with the question of the purpose of education. Here I have suggested that what is special and most likely unique about education is that it is not orientated towards *one* purpose – such as medicine's orientation towards (the promotion of) health or the legal profession's orientation towards (thee pursuit of) justice – but actually is orientated towards three purposes or, as I prefer to call it: three domains of purpose. The argument for this starts from a simple analysis of the way in which much education functions.

Many would probably agree that one of the key functions of education has to do with the transmission – or in less directive terms: the making available of – knowledge and skills. This *qualification* function of education is an important task for education and provides an important justification for schooling. Whereas some would argue that this is all schools should do, it is not too difficult to see that even the simplest provision of knowledge and skills already provides a certain way of (re)presenting the world and presenting what is considered to be of value.[13] In addition to qualification there is, therefore, always also *socialisation* going on – the (re)presentation of cultures, traditions and practices, either explicitly but often also implicitly,

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[11] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New, Revised 20th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Continuum, 1993).

[12] One of the problems with the current 'age of measurement' is that the question of the purpose of education is often answered in terms of the production of measurable 'learning outcomes.' See Gert Biesta, *Good Education in an Age of Measurement: Ethics, Politics, Democracy* (Boulder, Co: Paradigm Publishers, 2010).

[13] Klaus Mollenhauer, *Forgotten Connections: On Culture and Upbringing* (London/New York: Routledge, 2013).

as the research on the hidden curriculum has shown. Further to qualification and socialisation, it can be argued that education always also impacts on the student as individual, either by enhancing or by restricting capacities and capabilities, for example. This third function can be called individuation, although in my own work – for reasons outlined below – I have referred to it as *subjectification.*

From the observation that education always *functions* in relation to three domains, it can be argued that those involved in the design and enactment of education – including policy makers and teachers – should always engage with the question what their efforts seek to bring about in each domain. In this, the three functions of education turn into three *purposes* of education or, if it is acknowledged that under each 'heading' more concrete decisions still need to be made, three *domains of educational purpose.*[14] While many have found it helpful and in a sense rather intuitive to think about the point and purpose of education in this threefold way, it is particularly the 'third' domain, that of subjectification, that has remained difficult to grasp – and I have to say that I probably did not appreciate the complexity of this idea when I first presented it.[15] So what is entailed in the idea of subjectification, and what is at stake in it? Why, in other words, does it matter for education?

Subjectification: Be a self!
Put simply, what is at stake in the idea of subjectification is our freedom as human beings and, more specifically, our freedom to act or to refrain from action.[16] This is not about freedom as a theoretical construct or complicated philosophical concept, but concerns the much more mundane experience that in many, and perhaps even all situations we encounter in our lives we always have a possibility to say yes or to say no, to stay or to walk away, to go with the flow or to resist – and encountering this possibility in one's own life, particularly

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[14] There are other authors who have argued for the multi-facetted nature of educational purpose. Kieran Egan, for example, has suggested that education should focus on socialisation, the acquisition of (academic) knowledge, and the promotion of individual development, and has argued that it should be possible to give all three a place in education. Zvi Lamm makes a similar distinction between socialisation, acculturation and individuation as three possible aims of education, although he tends to think that they cannot be united within one system. Jerome Bruner, discussing 'the complexity of educational aims,' identifies three unresolvable tensions regarding the aims of education: the tension between individual development and cultural reproduction; the tension between the development of talents and the acquisition of tools; and the tension between the particular and the universal. See Kieran Egan, *The Future of Education: Reimagining our Schools from the Ground up* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008), chapter 2; Zvi Lamm, *Conflicting Theories of Instruction: Conceptual Dimensions* (Berkeley, CA: McCutchan, 1976); Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 66—85.

[15] In this regard both understandings and misunderstandings of the idea of subjectification have been helpful in clarifying my own thoughts.

[16] I'm thinking here of the 'category' of 'intentional non-action,' that is the unique human capacity to decide not to act or to refrain from action.

encountering it for the first time, is a very significant experience.[17] Freedom viewed in this way is fundamentally an *existential* matter; it is about how we exist, how we lead our own life, which of course no one else can do for us.[18] Put differently, freedom is a first-person matter. It is about how I exist as subject of my own life, not as object of what other people want from me.

Education has not always had an interest in freedom or, to be more precise, it has not always had an interest in the *promotion* of freedom (and we could even say that is still the case in many places today). For a long time in the history of the West, education's interest was, as Jaeger has put it, 'aristocratic' rather than 'democratic.'[19] It was there to provide those who were *already* free – wealthy men, in most cases – with the cultural resources to work on their own perfection.

Perhaps the first author who put freedom explicitly on the educational agenda was Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In *Emile, or On Education* (1762) Rousseau not only argued that the work of the educator is to protect Emile (and children more generally) from too strong influences from the outside – as indicated in the famous opening sentence "Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man."[20] He also argues that Emile should not be overwhelmed by forces from the 'inside' – his passions, as Rousseau calls them. Seen in this way, the key theme of the book can be understood as that of how education can help children and young people to obtain 'sovereignty' in light of the societal and natural forces they are subjected to.

The interest in the promotion of freedom presents educators with a predicament, expressed succinctly by Immanuel Kant as the so-called educational paradox: "How do I cultivate freedom through coercion?"[21] There is indeed something odd about education's interest the promotion of the freedom of children and young people, particularly if one starts from the (correct) assumption that the freedom to act is part of the human condition: we simply cannot *not* act. Two things are important here, and they belong to the core of the modern educational tradition – that is the tradition from Rousseau onwards. The first has to do with the particular 'quality' of educational action; the second with what this action is aimed it.

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[17] I am not just thinking of children here. There are societal and political conditions that can easily make people 'forget' that this is an option for them at all. See for example the discussion on this in Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.*

[18] If this sounds too abstract: it is like walking, which is also something we have to do ourselves – no one else can walk for us (see the interesting section on walking in Mollenhauer, *Forgotten Connections*).

[19] Werner Jaeger, W. (1965). *Paideia: Archaic Greece. The Mind of Athens* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965); see also Carl-Anders Säfström, "Paideia and the Search for Freedom in the Public of Today," *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, in press.

[20] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*. Trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 37.

[21] In German it reads: 'Wie kultiviere Ich die Freiheit bei dem Zwange?' Immanuel Kant, "Über Pädagogik,2 in I. Kant, *Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichtsphilosophie, Politik und Pädagogik,* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1982), 711.

A helpful and very accurate phrase in this context is Dietrich Benner's suggestion to understand education as 'Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit.'[22] 'Aufforderung' is not the cultivation of an object – which is a problem with Kant's formulation[23] – but can better be understood as a summoning, as encouragement, one might say, that speaks to the child or young person *as* subject.[24] 'Selbsttätigkeit,' which literally means self-action, is not the injunction to be active but to be(come) *self*-active. In more everyday language this is not about becoming *your*self, and particularly not about being yourself in the simplistic sense of just doing what you want to do, but about being *a* self, being a subject of your own life.

'Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit,' summoning the child or young person to be a self (Benner), arousing a desire in children and young people to exist as subject of their own life (Biesta), refusing children and young people the comfort of *not* being a subject (Rancière), is what education as subjectification is about. It is, therefore, not about the educational production of the subject – in which the subject would be reduced to an object – but is about bringing the subject-ness of the child or young person 'into play,' so to speak; helping the child or young person not to forget that they *can* exist as subject.[25]

What I particularly like about Homer Lane's 'complicated and unusual incident' – which was not pre-planned but was an educational opportunity Lane was able to spot and seize – is that it provides such a clear example of both the dynamics and the orientation of education as subjectification. What Lane does, almost literally, is putting Jason's freedom in his Jason's hands. Lane doesn't condemn Jason; he doesn't say, for example, that Jason is pretty irresponsible and should become responsible. He is not saying that Jason has the wrong character traits and should work on his character or receive some character education. He is not saying that Jason lacks something and is in need of learning.

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[22] Dietrich Benner, *Allgemeine Pädagogik. 8. Auflage* (Weinheim/München: Juventa, 2015).

[23] Gert Biesta, "Can the Prevailing Description of Educational Reality be Considered Complete? On the Parks-Eichmann Paradox, Spooky Action at a Distance, and a Missing Dimension in the Theory of Education," *Policy Futures in Education*, in press.

[24] Such speaking can be counterfactual – it can go against all the evidence we have in front of us – think for example when parents speak to their new-born baby, where there is as yet little evidence that this baby is a subject, let alone that it is a subject who is capable of understanding the meaning of what his or her parents are saying. Yet it is the very approaching of the baby as if it were a subject that opens up the possibility for future existence as subject. On the dynamics of this 'gesture' see chapter 5 in Gert Biesta, *The Rediscovery of Teaching* (London/New York: Routledge, 2017).

[25] This shows that the educational gesture here is fundamentally non-affirmative – another helpful phrase from Benner – because the educator is not telling the child or young person how they should become, what they should do with their freedom, which 'template' or 'image' they should adopt and aspire to, which all would be instances of affirmative education. See Dietrich Benner, "Bildsamkeit und Bestimmung. Zu Fragestellung und Ansatz nicht-affirmativer Bildungstheorie, in Dietrich Benner, *Studien zur Theorie der Erziehung und Bildung. Bd. 2* (Weinheim: Juventa, 1995), 141–159.

Lane is doing nothing more – but also nothing less – than confronting Jason with his freedom, reminding him that it is *his* freedom, not Lane's freedom, and the whole point of having this freedom is that it is up to Jason what to do with this freedom. Lane is, in other words, 'reminding' Jason of his possibility to exist as subject of his own life, not as object of all the forces that 'come' at Jason, both from the 'outside,' and from the 'inside.' The story is perhaps a little sugar-coated – in a sense, as mentioned, it is presented as a success story – but the dynamics are real, and Jason was of course entirely free to smash the watch as well, had he decided to do so.[26]

Freedom and its limits
Although freedom is at the very heart of education as subjectification, it is important to see that this is not the freedom to just do what you want to do; it is, in other words, not the neo-liberal 'freedom of shopping.'[27] Subjectification rather is about 'qualified' freedom, that is, freedom integrally connected to our existence as subject. This is never an existence just with and for ourselves, but always an existence in and with the world. An existence with human beings and other living creatures and 'in' a physical environment that is not a simple backdrop, a context in which we act, but rather a complex network *through* which we act; a network, moreover, that sustains and nurtures us. This world is real and puts real limits on our actions, albeit that one important aspect of trying to exist as subject is to figure out what these limits are, which limits should be taken into consideration, which limits are real, and which limits are the effect of arbitrary (ab)use of power. The question of democracy has everything to do with the limits that our living together poses to our own freedom. The ecological crisis shows us in a very forceful manner that our engagement with the living and the physical world also cannot be limitless.

Hannah Arendt's reflections on action and freedom are actually quite helpful here, because she suggests a more precise definition of human action which amounts to a more precise understanding of human freedom. Arendt makes a distinction between the human capacity to begin, to take initiative, and what it means for those initiatives to become real, to arrive in the world. her key insight is that for the latter to happen, our initiatives need to be taken up by others and it is only when this happens that Arendt speaks about action. 'Action' for Arendt thus refers to our beginnings plus the ways they are taken up by others. This helps to understand why Arendt claims that we can never act in isolation – "to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act"[28] – as we are entirely dependent upon the ways in which others take up our beginnings (or fail to do so).

This is an important reason why Arendt prefers the word 'subject' over notions such as 'individual,' because in action we are subjects in the two-fold sense of the word: we are the subjects of our own initiatives and are subjected to how others take up and continue our beginnings. Arendt emphasises that others are beginners as well and therefore have the

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[26] On several occasions, when presenting Lane's story, I meet teachers who guess that some of their students would go for the watch as well!
[27] Gert Biesta, "Schools in an Age of Shopping. Democratic Education Beyond Learning. In Schools of tomorrow, ed. Silvia Fehrmann (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2019).
[28] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 188.

freedom to take up our beginnings in their own way rather than how we may have wanted them to handle our beginners. Although it is tempting to want to control what other people do with our beginnings, we would then actually block their opportunities for bringing their beginnings into the world. We would end up in a world in which only I can act, and everyone else would end up as follower.

A slightly different way of making the point that our freedom is not unlimited, has to do with the fact that we exist, that we live our lives, in a world that is not of our own making, but that exists independent from us. We live, in other words, in a real world, not a phantasy (and this real world includes 'our' body as well). We encounter this reality when our initiatives meet resistance – first of all the resistance of the material world but also, of course, the resistance of the social world, the resistance of other human beings who, if they take up our beginnings at all, may do so in very different and unexpected ways.

From the perspective of our intentions and initiatives, the encounter with resistance generates a degree of frustration. Out of such frustration we could try to push harder in order to overcome the resistance we encounter. This is sometimes important for our initiatives to arrive in the world, but there is always the danger that if we push too hard we may destroy the very world in which we seek to arrive. If, at one end of the spectrum we thus find the risk of world-destruction, at the other end of the spectrum we find the existential risk of self-destruction: when, out of our frustration, we step back and withdraw ourselves from the situation. This suggests that the existential challenge – which is lifelong – is that of trying to stay in the difficult 'middle ground' in between world-destruction and self-destruction. This is the place – physically and metaphorically – where we try to be 'at home in the world' (Arendt), try to 'reconcile ourselves to reality' (Arendt).[29]

The difference between phantasy and reality maps onto an important distinction in the educational literature between an 'infantile' and a 'grown-up' way of trying to live one's life.[30] If the infantile way of leading one's life is characterised by a disregard for what is real – just pursuing one's own desires, just doing what one fancies to do – the grown-up way of trying to lead one's life is characterised by the desire to give one's desires a 'reality check,' so to speak, so as to come into a relationship with what and who is other, not simply overrule it.

The terms 'infantile' and 'grown-up' are rather stark, particularly because they seem to suggest that the difference has something to do with age. It seems to suggest that once we have reached a certain age we have resolved the difficulty of engaging with what is real, and have resolved it for the rest of our lives, whereas up to a certain age we are supposed to be unable to do this. We all know, however, that the challenge of reconciling ourselves to reality is a lifelong challenge. And we also know that children are sometimes perfectly able to stay in the middle ground, whereas many adults keep pursuing phantasies. A slightly better set of

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[29] Hannah Arendt, "Understanding and Politics. (The Difficulties of Understanding), in *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954*, eds. Hannah Arendt and Jerome Kohn, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1994), 307—8.
[30] See particularly Philippe Meirieu, *Pédagogie: Le devoir de Résister* (Issy-les-Moulineaux : ESF éditeur, 2007).

terms, inspired by Levinas, is therefore to see it as the difference between an ego-logical and a non-ego-logical way of trying to exist, trying to lead one's life.[31]

Education as subjectification
Education as subjectification, education as 'Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit,' is therefore clearly orientated towards grown-up ways of existing, grown-up ways of trying to lead one's life. But it doesn't think of grown-up-ness as the outcome of a developmental trajectory or a trajectory of cultivation or socialisation, but rather as a never-resolved existential challenge: the challenge of trying to live one's life in the difficult 'middle ground.' Education as subjectification is not about forcing children and young people to stay there, but is better described as encouraging an 'appetite' for trying to live one's life in the world, so to speak; it is about arousing a desire for wanting to try to live one's life in the world, without thinking oneself in the centre of the world, as Philippe Meirieu has put it.[32]

Unlike what some may think, this suggests a rather concrete set of educational 'parameters.' One thing it asks from education is that education makes an encounter with the real possible – an encounter that allows for a 'reality check.' This requires, among other things, that education does not remain conceptual but that there is something real at stake; that the world, in its materiality and its sociality, can be encountered. An encounter with what is real manifests itself in most cases as an *interruption* – an interruption with the flow of intentions and initiatives, which means that education for subjectification has an interruptive quality.

Meeting the real, and meeting one's desires in relation to what is real, is not a 'quick fix' but actually requires time. That is why education as subjectification needs to work with the principle of '*suspension*' – of slowing down, of giving time, so that students can meet the world, meet themselves in relation to the world, and 'work through' all this. The reminder that the Greek word 'schole' actually means 'free time,'[33] time that is not yet made productive, is very helpful here, as it suggests that school needs to provide this possibility for slowing down, for trying, failing, trying again, and failing better, as Samuel Beckett has formulated it so nicely.

Interestingly I think that what A.S. Neill tried to do at Summerhill was precisely to give young people time, particularly the time to encounter their own freedom, because only once they had encountered that 'point' more formal education would become possible and meaningful for them.[34] If education as subjectification keeps referring students 'back' to the middle ground, so to speak, it is important that it provides them with support and *sustenance* to manage to stay with the difficulty. Interruption, suspension and sustenance are therefore three important and in a sense very concrete aspects of what is required from education if it

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[31] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh, PA & & The Hague: Duquesne University Press & Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), 35.

[32] "Un élève-sujet est capable de vivre dans le monde sans occuper le centre du monde." Meirieu, *Pédagogie,* 96.

[33] Jan Masschelein & Maarten Simons, In Defence of the School: A Public Issue. Translated by Jack McMartin. (Leuven: E-ducation, Culture & Society Publishers, 2013).

[34] Janusz Korczack is another 'champion' of suspended education.

takes subjectification seriously. Although it is also not difficult to see that they go against the grain of where much contemporary education seems to be going in its rather single-minded orientation on qualification and socialisation: fast and furious rather than slow and with a degree of patience.

What subjectification is not
If the foregoing sheds some further light on what subjectification is about and what education as subjectification aims at and looks like, I now wish to make a few observations about what subjectification is *not*, particularly in order to identify interpretations of the idea of subjectification that see, to miss the point, either partially or completely.

One suggestion that is often made, is that the idea of subjectification, of existing as subject, is the same as the idea of *identity*. Although the notion of identity is complex and discussions about its meaning and status are ongoing,[35] it seems safe to say that identity concerns the question of *who* I am, both in terms of what I identify with and how I can be identified by others and by myself. The question of subject-ness, however, is not the question of who I am but the question of *how* I am, that is to say, the question how I exist, how I try to lead my life, how I try respond to and engage with what I encounter in my life. It therefore includes the question as to what I will 'do' with my identity – and with everything I have learned, my capacities and competences, but also my blind spots, my inabilities, and incompetence – in a given situation, particularly those situations when I am called upon or, to put it differently, where my 'I' is called upon. This also means that the 'work' of identity actually takes place in the domain of *socialisation*. It is, after all, in that domain that education seeks to provide students with access to traditions and practices, with the invitation to 'locate' oneself in some way in such traditions and practices (bearing in mind that this is not a process over which we have total control, also because our self-identifications may be quite different from how others identify us).

Subjectification also has nothing to do with personality and personality development. Personality is a psychological construct that seeks to explain the tendencies that underly differences in behaviour, often in terms of particular personality 'traits.' It is not just that personality is a psychological concept whereas subject-ness is an educational one. Much more important for the line of thought in this paper is the fact that personality is an *explanatory* concept. It is an attempt to explain why people act how they act. In doing so it looks at individuals as explainable 'objects' (or with a slightly 'softer' word: entities) from the outside, from a third person perspective. Subject-ness, on the other hand, is not an explanation or explanatory concept, but refers to how individuals exist, from the inside-out, so to speak. It is therefore a first-person perspective – it is the perspective from the individual who acts (or decides not to act). Seeing the different 'status' of personality and subject-ness, that is, the one being a third-person perspective concept and the other a first-person perspective concept, is also important in order to make sure that personality tests – such as the currently rather popular Big Five Inventory – don't enter the existential domain of subjectification (and

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[35] See, e.g., Seth J. Schwartz, Koen Luyckx and Vivian L. Vignoles, eds., *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research* (New York: Springer, 2013).

preferably don't enter the domain of education altogether). Subjectification, in other words, is not another thing students must achieve and should be tested on.

Subject-ness is also not about the subjective or the personal. In a sense we could even say that subject-ness is the opposite of the subjective or the personal, because it is about our existence in and with the world, rather than one's own personal or subjective opinions, thoughts and beliefs. This also means that subjectification is not about expressing one's personal opinion or inner feelings, but, as I have tried to outline above, about how such opinions and feelings 'encounter' the world. Education as subjectification is therefore not about asking students for their opinions, or providing them with opportunities to express themselves 'without limits.' This doesn't mean that subjectification is about forbidding students to express themselves. It rather is about making sure that what students express can 'meet' the world so that a reality check, as I have put it, becomes possible. After all, students may express wonderful things, but also very problematic ideas and convictions, so just to 'accept' any expression because it comes from the student, is not just un-educational but can actually be problematic and even dangerous.[36]

It is perhaps not too difficult to see now, that subjectification should also be distinguished from individuation. It is, again, one thing to become an individual through one's interaction with 'culture' in the widest sense possible, yet still another to exist as subject in relation to one's individuality, in relation to and 'with' everything one has gained, learned, acquired and developed. This also means, and this is important as well, that subjectification should not be understood as a process of becoming, as a development *towards* being a subject. Subjectification is what always interrupts our becoming, so we might say.[37] It is an event that occurs in the here and now.

There are two more points I wish to make here. One more minor point is that subjectification should not be conflated with what I suggest referring to as 'self-objectification.' In many countries students are now encouraged – or simply being told – that they should take ownership of and responsibility for their own learning, and there are detailed strategies, including learning contracts, that try to make this happen. Although at first sight it may look empowering to hand over ownership to students, what is actually happening is that we force students into modes of self-management where they need to monitor and regulate themselves and their behaviour, thus basically turning themselves into an object of their own control and management. This is where self-objectification takes place, also resulting in a remarkable split between the self that manages and the self that is being managed. Rather than empowering, these strategies often offload the responsibility of teachers onto students. And in most cases the empowerment they claim to offer is actually pseudo-empowerment, because as soon as students would take ownership by saying that they would rather not learn or would rather leave the school altogether, they will probably be told that that's not possible.

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[36] Gert Biesta, "What If? Art Education Beyond Expression and Creativity," in *International Encyclopedia of Art and Design Education*, eds. R. Hickman, J. Baldacchino, K. Freedman, E. Hall & N. Meager (London/New York: Taylor & Francis, 2019).
[37] See also the discussion on Rosa Parks and Adolf Eichmann in Biesta, "Can the Prevailing Description of Educational Reality be Considered Complete?"

The final point I wish to emphasise is that subjectification should not be understood in terms of being responsible or, more specifically, in terms of taking one's responsibility. Subjectification, in other words, is not a moral category, just as education as subjectification should not be understood as a form of moral education, and definitely not as a form of moralising education.[38] Put simply, subjectification is not about responsibility but about freedom, including the freedom *not* to be responsible, the freedom to walk away from one's responsibility, so to speak. This is not to suggest that subjectification and responsibility have nothing to do with each other, but the relationship is a different one, and it is important to bear this in mind, also in order not to think that subjectification is entirely or automatically positive and happy. Human freedom can, after all, lead to the most wonderful but also to the most disastrous things we can imagine.

Responsibility – and here I follow Emmanuel Levinas – is not something we choose, but is actually something we encounter. And it is in such encounters, when a responsibility comes to me, so to speak, that my subject-ness, my existence as subject, actually begins to matter or comes into play. Zygmunt Bauman has captured this wonderfully when he wrote that "responsibility is the first reality of the self."[39] This means that the self doesn't first exist and then decides whether or not he or she wishes to become responsible. It is actually in situations of responsibility that the whole question of the self, of 'me,' begins to matter, as responsibility always calls *me*. But whether I 'take' responsibility for the responsibility I encounter – again a formulation from Bauman[40] – or whether I walk away from the responsibility I encounter, is entirely up to me. That is the exercise of my freedom and the event of my existing-as-subject. The encounter with responsibility is therefore the 'moment' where I encounter my freedom and thus my unique existence as subject – unique in the sense that it is up to me what to do there, which no one can do for me.[41] This is uniqueness-as-irreplaceability which is very different from the idea of uniqueness-as-difference that characterises the phenomenon of identity.

The beautiful risks of education
I have paid considerable attention to the domain of subjectification, not just because it is the most difficult of the three domains and perhaps the one that has been most misunderstood. I also tend to think that it is the most important of the three domains, not because knowledge,

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[38] If it is part of any form of education at all, it is first and foremost a form of existential education. On this see Herner Saeverot, *Indirect Pedagogy: Some Lessons in Indirect Education* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2012).

[39] Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1993), 13.

[40] Zygmunt Bauman, *Leven met Veranderlijkheid, Verscheidenheid en Onderzekerheid* (Amsterdam: Boom, 1998).

[41] The best example of encountering this situation, and encountering oneself in such a situation, comes from Alfonso Lingis who refers to the situation where a friend of you who is doing asks to see you. This is a question that is there just for you – a question that literally 'singles you out' – but you are, of course, still free not to respond to your friends question. See Alfonso Lingis, *The Community of Those Who have Nothing in Common* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994).

skills and traditions are not important, but because it is only when subjectification enters the scene that we are in the domain of education, whereas without a place for subjectification we are in the domain of training which , as John Dewey already noted, is something we do *to* others, thus approaching them as things or objects, not *with* them, which would be approaching them as subjects. This does not suggest, however, that qualification, socialisation and subjectification can be separated, and even less does it suggest that it is possible for education to focus on only one dimension. Although it may sometimes look as if this is happening – particularly the contemporary obsession with the domain of qualification – nothing would happen there if the student wouldn't 'invest,' if that word makes sense.

There is a further relationship between the three domains, which has something to do with the fact that talking about education in terms of the acquisition of knowledge and skills is actually misleading, because skills – to focus on this for a moment – do never exist in a vacuum, do not just hang 'in the air,' because there is always an individual who actually 'has' these or other skills. Having skills, or being skilful therefore cannot do without a subject, just as having knowledge or being knowledgeable cannot do without a subject. This begins to suggest that the relationship between qualification, socialisation and subjectification is more complicated, but also more interconnected, than what my initial suggestion that this could be depicted as a Venn-diagram with three domains that partially overlap, indicated. Perhaps it's better to think of it as three concentric circles, where either subjectification is at the centre, because it is 'core,' or whether subjectification is the outer 'ring,' because it encompasses the other two domains. The issue here is, however, particularly an educational one, as it raises the question what it actually means to teach knowledge or skills – and perhaps also what it 'takes,' particularly in terms of what it does to and requires from the student as subject.[42]

This brings me to what I alluded to in the title of this paper, namely the question of risk in education or, more precisely, the question of the risks of education, and why it is appropriate to refer to them as *beautiful* risks. At one level, the risks of education are simple and clear. We, as educators have intentions, such as giving students knowledge, skills and understanding, but also values, attitudes, ways of doing and ways of being, and what is important here is that students 'get it' and that they get it 'right.' The point is, of course, that most students do not immediately 'get it,' let alone that they get it 'right,' and one could say that the whole educational endeavour is geared towards getting students closer to getting it right. This is an open process *precisely* because there are students in the room, so to speak, and in this way education always entails a risk, namely the risk that students won't get it or won't get it sufficiently right.

A huge part of educational research and policy nowadays is aimed at reducing this risk, and at one level this is entirely justified, because getting it right matters. But there is a tipping point in the ambition to reduce this particular risk. This is the point where education becomes nothing but perfect reproduction and thus turns into indoctrination. It is the point where there is no longer an opportunity for the student to exist as subject. This partly is the 'big'

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[42] In continental terms this is the discussion about the didactical implications of the idea of the three domains of educational purpose – an issue I hope to be able to explore in more detail in the future.

question as to whether there is space for students to exist within educational situations and settings. But is also a very practical question, in that in education we should make room for students' sense-making – which teachers indeed cannot do for their students – and for exploring the unknown or the not-yet-known. Even within the context of sound curriculum thinking, squeezing the risk out of education is simply un-educational. In this regard, this risk is important and relevant for education's sake, even if our first interest is in good and meaningful qualification and socialisation.

But as soon as we acknowledge that education is also about subjectification, then the subject-ness of the student is not a problem that needs to be overcome in order to make the educational machine more predictable and effective, but actually the very point of our endeavours. This means, however, that there always is a possibility and should be a possibility that our students take their freedom, turn back to us and say that they don't want or, perhaps more importantly, don't need our intentions. This risk is always there in education as well and, again, if we see this as a risk that needs to be overcome, a problem that needs to be 'solved, we actually eradicate education itself. Klaus Mollenhauer has captured this very well by arguing that although education always needs intentions, such intentions have to be understood as structurally *broken* intentions.[43]

These risks, therefore, are proper to education; they belong to education if, that is, education takes its broad remit of qualification, socialisation and subjectification seriously. The reason to refer to these risks with an aesthetic term – beauty – is because the reason for 'allowing' for these risks has everything to do with the possibility for the student to appear, and to appear as subject. 'Allowing' this risk to 'take place' is not just a matter of allowing for a risk to occur 'outside' of us; it is actually the point where we also risk ourselves as educators and this is the third (beautiful) risk of education.

The reason that we risk ourselves in education, has to do with the simple fact that education always arrives with the student as an act of power, even if it is well-intended and even if what is at the heart of this intention is the interest in the freedom of the student, in his or her existence as subject in and with the world. We should not hide this fact by such suggestions as that, as teacher, we are 'just' a facilitator, or 'just' a coach, or 'just' a fellow learner. In all cases we give something that students didn't ask for. What we hope for is that, at some point, students may turn back to us and tell us that what we tried to give them was actually quite helpful, meaningful, even if, initially, it was difficult to receive. At that point we can say that the exercise of power transforms into a relationship of authority, where what intervened from the outside is authorised by the student – is 'allowed' to be an author, is 'allowed' to speak and have a voice. But students may, of course, decide not to do so, or they may only do so long after they have left school, so that their authorisation does not arrive back with us, as teachers. The possibility that our acts of power remain 'unresolved,' so to speak, therefore is a risk that we should be willing to carry as well.

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[43] Klaus Mollenhauer, *Theorien zum Erziehungsprozess* (München, Juventa, 1972), 15.