Indirect Pedagogy

Some Lessons in Existential Education

Herner Saeverot

While existential issues perhaps concern people the most, today’s education is not as preoccupied with such issues. Instead, education is becoming more uniform and streamlined; more and more one-sidedly directed towards what is useful. The purpose of this book is to focus on education’s existential dimension. Such a focus requires at least three things. Firstly, we need to justify why it is necessary to reconnect with existentialism in education. Secondly, we need to undergo an examination of the quality of existential education, so that we can have a basis as to what kind of educational interests teachers should have. Thirdly, we need to gain knowledge about how teachers may teach in light of existential matters.

However, to teach in light of existence is highly paradoxical in that existence cannot be forced on someone, but is rather a subjective matter. Teaching which is non-ironical or too direct can thus be very problematic concerning existential issues. The reason being that there is no objective truth in terms of existence. There is only a matter of subjective or existential truth, which is only true for the single individual. Therefore, the book suggests that the approach teachers take must be discrete and indirect so as to create room for students to take responsibility for their subjective truth. Such an indirect pedagogy is not a programme, but rather a form of existential education.

The overall aim of the book is, by way of introducing and developing the concept of indirect pedagogy, to extend and reinvent the language of teaching.

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Indirect Pedagogy

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By

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While society is increasingly exposed to terror, fanaticism and strong, uniform ideologies, education is becoming more uniform and streamlined, so that investors (most of whom are politicians) can be sure that they get value for their money. However, an education which is one-sidedly directed towards what is useful, will lack the depth that is necessary in order to prevent possible misuse of skills, knowledge and competencies. This is also a lesson that history has taught us. Consider, for example, the Second World War and the recent terror attacks. These events testify that some educated people, with the highest university learning outcomes, had no qualms about being cruel. A type of education where the student acquires knowledge, skills and general competencies with short-term utility in focus, does not give enough resistance to such atrocities. Of course there are never any guarantees in preventing atrocities from occurring, but I still believe that ‘existential education,’ as I am about to describe it, may have a preventive effect against various forms of cruel acts, primarily because it creates possibilities for stepping out of an existence as a brick in the wall, and into a form of existence where we take responsibility for our responsibility. In this way we may be better prepared to meet all the crises we face today, crises within democracy, economy, environment etc. Perhaps we can even prevent new crises by way of retaking direct, personal responsibility with regard to our fellow human beings and our surroundings. These are some of the reasons why I argue that the existential aspect must permeate the content of education, and not just be represented in education.

A central question of this book is how the teacher can teach in light of existential matters. To address this question I introduce a concept which I refer to as ‘indirect pedagogy.’ The aim is, by way of integrating the concept of indirect pedagogy into the field of educational theory and practice, to extend and reinvent the language of teaching. This indirect approach to pedagogy, which is a form of existential education rather than a locked method, is opposed to the pedagogic language used by the kind of teacher who likes to explain things, including how to exist as a human. Being non-ironic or too straightforward and too direct can be very problematic when it comes to existential matters, as there is no single answer to questions concerning existence. Besides, the teacher apparently won’t get very far by speaking convincingly to the intellect about the excellence of one way of existing. What then? Should the teacher simply give up? Yes, either that or the teacher can appeal to something that lies ‘deeper’ in the student than the rational consciousness. This can be done via irony, seduction, deceit, etc., as these communication forms are non-rational and unpredictable. That is also why they
can lead us away from ourselves almost without us noticing it, and over into a path we perhaps in the beginning had no desire to take. Of course one is taking a risk planting seeds in the students unconscious that are in direct opposition to their conscious wishes. One is in danger of leading the students astray. It is precisely here that the ethical boundary becomes relevant, something we must not close our eyes to. Nevertheless, these communication forms can be pedagogically and existentially valuable, and this has, in part, to do with that they have a magical power that we do not understand—for example a power with the ability to bring about a fascination for something.

In my opinion, seduction, deception and similar concepts are very unused and little approved educational resources—which is understandable given the potential dangers of such rhetorical means. This is why we need to have certain knowledge about when these concepts can be educative and how they can be used safely. For example, seduction can awaken a desire in students to ask questions about their existence. In this way seduction can happen without coercion, or to be more precise, the students are coerced into questioning their position in life, rather than being coerced into a particular position in life. In other words, seduction has the advantage of neglecting the moralistic or didactic forms that make students servants to fixed ideas. Consequently, the existential seducer creates the opportunity for students to have a joint influence on their own lives. Deceit, too, may be a powerful contribution to existential education because the very unruly nature and vitality of deceit has the power to sharpen our sensitivity and attentiveness and make us ‘see’ that something is other than it seems to be or ‘see’ and ‘hear’ what we did not expect. That is one of the reasons why deceit poses a serious challenge to the way we exist, without being controlled by moralising and didacticism. Deceit is connected to insecurity and uncertainty and can only ‘educate’ in unpredictable ways.

Even though I, to a relatively large extent, have found theoretical inspiration in Kierkegaard, Nabokov and Levinas for this book; I construct, independently from their thinking, educational problems which in my view are relevant for modern education.

The book consists of a prologue, seven chapters and an epilogue. Although I have not divided the book into different parts, one may imagine a division that looks like this: Chapter 1 argues for the need to reconnect with existentialism in education (the question of why existential education). Chapters 2 and 7 examine the quality of existential education (the question of what interests the teacher should have). Chapters 3 to 6 develop the concept of indirect pedagogy (the question of how to perform indirect pedagogy). Even though I do not speak plainly about the concept of indirect pedagogy in each of these chapters, this particular concept is always indirectly present. Also, the concept of indirect pedagogy is being created as we move towards the epilogue. A description of the chapters and the epilogue is outlined below.

Chapter 1 underlines the need to reconnect with existentialism in education. Chapter 2 focuses upon the quality of such an existential education. In this chapter I make use of the concept of time as a foundation for such an analysis, and initiate
the argument by claiming that substantial problems arise whenever a spatial concept of time forms the basis for existential education. To investigate this problem further I turn to American pragmatism, first and foremost the two well-known pragmatists John Dewey and Richard Rorty, as they have shown us that a spatial concept of time will prevent the individual from becoming individualised. Thus Dewey and Rorty introduce another concept of time, one that makes room for individualisation, understood as creative expression and redescription of history. Neither of these two solutions is satisfactory, it turns out, as soon as we place them in an ethico-existential framework. The chapter then turns to Emmanuel Levinas, in order to articulate a concept of time that introduces a notion of existential education wherein time occurs through actions of responsibility. My argument is thus: Not until education includes such a concept of time as a basis can we make room for the ethical existence of the student.

Chapter 3 aims at making a case for the role of seduction in existential education. As part of this task, I try to show that the relationship between the teacher and the student can be understood as a form of seduction. At the same time I warn against dangerous aspects related to seduction, as the border between seduction and manipulation is quite blurred. I conclude the chapter by offering five conditions for how seduction can be used in a justifiable manner in existential education. Chapter 4 argues that education is [im]possible, but only in the sense that it may open up the possibility of being ‘educated.’ I couch the argument in the context of Vladimir Nabokov’s novel Lolita. Through a hyper-phenomenological study, I try to demonstrate how Nabokov creates deceits and adverse forces in his writings so as to open up a space for existential education, wherein the reader can take active part.

Chapter 5 takes the position that the aim of existential teaching, that is, teaching where existential questions are addressed, consists in educating the student in light of subjective truth. Even though existence cannot be determined educationally, as it is a subjective matter, it does require some kind of education. My suggestion is thus: A pedagogical ‘expedient’ is required, which deprives of all types of constraint but still opens up for students to take responsibility for their subjective truth. I argue that this expedient can be irony, but not all types of irony. I therefore discuss which conception of irony existential teaching should and should not be connected with. Chapter 6 discusses some of the main problems with teacher praise, in which I basically argue that praise binds and controls the student instead of making room for existence. I go on to examine whether it is possible to praise without the intention to control the student. In this way I challenge conventional and standardised ways of praising, and argue that it may be possible to make room for the existence of the student through praise.

Chapter 7 brings us back to the first chapter wherein the concept of time was being examined. I continue the following argument: to exist as a person one has to be in time—or, the time of the Other. In this relationship, the idea of ‘God’ becomes relevant, as God, who is related to the Other, calls us to responsibility. As soon as education is built on God, instead of rules and principles, it is possible to make room for the existence of the student, as opposed to a predicate and
calculating relationship to the Other. In the epilogue I try to collect, through the concept of existential repetition, important threads which are put forward in this book.
CHAPTER 1

THE NEED FOR RECONNECTING WITH EXISTENTIALISM IN EDUCATION

THE HUMAN CAPITAL INVASION OF EDUCATION

My point of departure when it comes to the definition of the concept of existential education is that human beings do not possess an inner, objective truth. Thus existential education is not about obtaining objective truth, it is rather a matter of obtaining subjective truth. A premise of subjective truth is that one can never force upon another a meaning, persuasion or belief. The student must rather appropriate the existential communication from the teacher, make it into something subjective and personal, not only in order to think differently, but to start acting differently as well.

Thus the notion of existential education stands in sharp contrast to the human capital theory, which is spreading in the current political and educational landscape. To shed light on this phenomenon I will first go back in time, more specifically to Charlie Chaplin’s movie *Modern times* from 1936. Therein he presents a parody and caricature of industrialism’s inhumane working conditions. Those who have seen the movie may recall that Chaplin was standing at a conveyor belt, which sometimes moved so fast that he could not keep up. The task consisted in tightening nuts, a task that was so monotonous that he repeated the movements after work. The manager of the company controlled and monitored the workers everywhere, even in the bathroom, through strategically placed surveillance cameras. No wonder Chaplin’s character in this movie was admitted to a psychiatric clinic. Although this film draws a caricatured picture of both the employer and employees, there are several features of both these parties which may be associated with a more realistic picture.

The modern employer, however, is located in a knowledge society—in which knowledge is understood as a commodity that shall be converted for the best of community (Barnett, 1994, p. 48). Therein, the modern employer provides, among other things, courses on motivation and well-being. The goal being not only to improve the employee’s motivation and well-being, but also to reduce absenteeism, and—not least—to improve corporate profitability. Generally speaking, the purpose is to create harmony between corporate goals and visions on one side and the employees on the other. The reason is that this will provide the best opportunities for prosperity and cooperation between employer and employee, as well as increasing productivity and profits. Achieving a good working environment, which includes prosperity, collaboration, etc., suggests that the idea of human capital, which can be briefly defined as the single individual’s skills,
knowledge and competence, is given the best growing conditions (Robeyns, 2006). Therefore it is important to ensure that there is no disharmony between employees and corporate strategies and objectives, as this would give poor growing conditions for the human capital, causing the employer to benefit less from the employees.

Concepts of human capital have become more and more prominent in school policy, too. The idea is that it is important to utilize knowledge, which is equivalent to cultivating human capital, as it will be an important factor for competitiveness in a global economy. In other words, the knowledge or competence of each citizen will contribute to wealth creation and economic growth for the society. Therefore, politicians and others wish to create the best growing conditions for human capital in schools, as it is an important resource in terms of developing future welfare and increasing the economic profit of the society.

It can further be argued that students appear to be entrepreneurs who shall initiate and conduct the schools’ visions and goals because they are considered to be an investment that will provide financial profits. Therefore, the good life is easily defined as developing one’s abilities and talents. Without further ado, the contradictory conflict between the social economic benefits on one side and living a good life on the other side is simply revoked (Gilead, 2012, p. 113). Politicians and others who govern schools simply take for granted that each student can live a good life while at the same time emerge as an important resource and contributor to the national economy.¹ But what’s being overlooked is that students are forced into a particular way of existing. It is presupposed that students are reduced to beings who are completely determined by their abilities; their biological heritage. This form of, let’s say, ‘biological pedagogy,’ which has a one-sided emphasis on the development of skills, will lead to a lonely or non-relational form of existence. To develop one’s skills is all about developing abilities that can maximise one’s own interests and utilities. Thus it could lead to irresponsibility with respect to fellow human beings. In an existential perspective this is a very limited view of humanity, partly because the student is deprived of the profoundness that meetings and relationships with other people entail.

FREEDOM, CHOICE AND RESPONSIBILITY

What’s thought-provoking is that we find the same types of concepts in both human capital thinking and existentialism, such as freedom, choice and responsibility; however, it is very important to note that these concepts are used in very different ways, ways that lead to entirely different concepts of man. How might that be so?

Take for example the freedom to realise ourselves as human beings. Whereas previous generations did not have as many opportunities or choices to realise themselves, nowadays there is a strong focus on self-realisation and individualisation in schools. It is about cultivating the individual’s idiosyncrasies, because that is the usual way of defining us as human beings. At the same time the human capital idea must be cultivated, which coerces the individual into another role: namely, the role of an entrepreneur. To complement this role, individuals
must make the most out of themselves, after which the process of self-realisation on the one hand and the school’s profitability on the other are two sides of the same coin. Thus individuals themselves have become a kind of commodity, a situation which they are not free to opt out of—that is, if they want to remain within the system. Ultimately, there is not much choice as individuals must act according to the system’s indirect demand, that is, the demand to cultivate themselves in the context of what is considered to be useful and profitable. What’s useful and profitable in the context of schools are skills and knowledge, particularly the kind of skills and knowledge that can be measured. However, the unfortunate consequence is thus: that which falls outside this scale is considered useless, unprofitable and worthless.

What about responsibility? In fact, there is a lot focus on responsibility in the age of human capital, where one of the educational mantras reads thus: you should be responsible for your own learning. Such a change in practice is often characterized as a shift ‘from teaching to learning’—a shift which is part of a wider ‘learnification’ of educational discourse and practice, as pointed out by Biesta (2006). This is a typical example of removing responsibility from both teachers and school administrators. The responsibility for learning is transferred to students, who have to identify themselves with the school’s visions and values, after which they must assume their responsibilities as entrepreneurs. This leads to an individualised understanding of responsibility, where each and every student shall cultivate themselves and also develop their skills. The consequence is that this view of responsibility, where the human capital theory is the basis, strengthens the student’s egocentricity and lack of responsible actions—in other words, it hides a deep moral betrayal in relation to having responsibility for the Other and to the world as such.

Along the way there is the fear of financial loss and the desire for financial gain. Therefore it must be invested at all levels, and as early as possible. Kindergarten is a good example. What used to be a venue for play, physical activity and upbringing of the human being—all the way back to Fröbel’s idea of Menschenerziehung—has now become more and more of a venue for learning that prepares for schooling. This is related to the human capital mind-set, which says that the sooner children learn, the more society will benefit in financial terms. Children and youths are seen as important resources, in the sense that they can increase national wealth. Teachers are seen by politicians and others as the most important person with regard to students’ learning outcomes. Accordingly, it is important to raise teachers’ competence, so that they, as leaders of ‘student entrepreneurs,’ can initiate and conduct the school’s and society’s visions and goals. Thus one can ensure that the investment will pay off.

As a consequence of the human capital mind-set we have reached a mis-educative form of education, where students are slaves of society and its interests (Robeyns, 2006, pp. 72–73). Because of its very strong uniformity, economic and instrumental conditioning, which ultimately treats students as objects, the human capital mind-set contradicts humane existence. Therefore it is important to reconnect with existentialism in education, important as existentialism has always
represented a form of criticism of such ways of objectifying people. A special feature in existentialism is to treat people as subjects, who must be free, but not without assuming responsibility for their surroundings. What, then, does existentialism mean and how can we relate this concept to education?

THE CONCEPT OF EXISTENTIALISM AND ITS RELATION TO EDUCATION

Most people associate the concept of existentialism with Jean-Paul Sartre. In October 1945 he held the now-famous lecture *Existentialism is a humanism*, wherein one of his ambitions was to address the question ‘What is existentialism?’ The answer is simply “that existence precedes essence; or, if you prefer, that subjectivity must be our point of departure” (Sartre, 2007, p. 20). The thesis is explained in more detail in the following quote:

What do we mean here by ‘existence precedes essence?’ We mean that man first exists: he materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterwards defines himself. If man as the existentialists conceive of him cannot be defined, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature since there is no God to conceive of it. Man is not only that which he conceives himself to be, but that which he wills himself to be, and since he conceives of himself only after he exists, just as he wills himself to be after being thrown into existence, man is nothing other than what he makes of himself. This is the first principle of existentialism. (ibid., p. 22)

According to Sartre all people are free to choose themselves, hence existence precedes essence. This standpoint is related to the fact that Sartre was an atheist. He says that he represents an atheistic existentialism, where God does not exist, as opposed to, for example, Christian existentialism.

Although I do not discuss Sartre’s existentialism in the following, I do challenge his existential ideas indirectly. For example, in Chapter 7 I claim the opposite of what he claims; namely, that ‘God’ does exist. Furthermore, I identify the relation between essence and existence as an educational struggle, as opposed to Sartre (see ibid.) who prefers to decide a priority between existence and essence. This is evident in Chapter 5, where I introduce the idea of communicating directly-indirectly. On the one hand, the teacher needs to communicate directly (essence) so that the student can have some understanding of certain concepts and ideas. On the other hand, the teacher must communicate indirectly (existence) so that these concepts and ideas can be appropriated and put into action. This is a form of ironic teaching which has nothing to do with asserting control and authority, in which the ironist is trying to escort the student into believing what is indirectly said (essence). The student must rather struggle between essence and existence, and that may happen as a result of the teacher’s direct-indirect teaching. In this way there is room for subjective or existential truth, that is, a kind of truth that is true for the single individual, and no one else.
This kind of existential education has to do with freedom, as it is not about subjecting oneself to a unique power that exhorts individuals to go in a certain direction. Unlike an admonition, the existential education does not require anything. The recipients may as well say no, like Herman Melville’s Bartleby when he replies: “I would prefer not to” (Melville, 1853/2010, p. 25). This openness makes room for freedom, that is, freedom to choose and freedom to make what is communicated relevant to their own existence. Hence we may say that existential education is about existing in relation to subjective truth. This is not only a completely different way of thinking from the standards and uniformities of the idea of human capital, but it is also completely different from progressive education. For example, the progressive educator Dewey, for whom the social conception of freedom and subjectivity dominates, “does remain caught in an instrumentalistic approach, in that he sees participation in democracy as the way in which the socially intelligent person is created or produced” (Biesta, 2006, p. 132). In sharp contrast to Dewey’s conception of a free and democratic person, Biesta (see ibid.) introduces the idea of absolute subjectivity, where each individual is responsible for his or her responsibility. This is a first person perspective where the responsibility lies with the singular individual, rather than, as in the case of Dewey, aiming at the insertion of individuals into existing social, cultural, political and other ‘orders.’ As such, the basic importance of the existential is totally underestimated, as there is more or less no room for subjective truth.

The idea of subjective truth is clearly evident in Kierkegaard’s book Fear and trembling (1843), wherein Johannes de Silentio dismantles Hegel’s concept of education (in German: Bildung) as he believes that this concept brings about conventional and bourgeois individuals. The reason is, according to Kierkegaard, that the individual must put himself aside in order to advance culture. As an alternative to the idea of education as cultivation, de Silentio introduces an existentialist view of education.

What, then, is education? I believed [sic] it is the course the individual goes through in order to catch up with himself, and the person who will not go through this course is not much helped by being born in the most enlightened age. (Kierkegaard, 1843/1983, p. 46; my emphasis)

This indicates that one will not be oneself by incorporating cultural values and norms as Hegel maintains. Rather, one must be involved with Kierkegaard’s idea of ‘catching up with oneself.’ This means searching back to how one was before culture began to influence one’s life. Kierkegaard wants the individual to take a critical distance to the culture, so that the process of singularisation can take place, more or less, without cultivation or socialisation. As the individual goes into this process, he may be made anew. The core for this form of existential education, seen from the teacher’s perspective, is to cultivate the individual’s specificities, singularity and uniqueness, which Kierkegaard in 1854 described as ‘distinctiveness’ (in Danish: Eiendommelighed; see Kierkegaard, 1854/2009, p. 346). According to Kierkegaard our distinctiveness has been given to each of us by God (ibid.). Kierkegaard’s God is not particularly sympathetic to the bourgeois or
of conventionalism, but has a weakness for the marginal, those who do not immediately fit into certain cultural circles (ibid., p. 347).

Against this background it is possible to interpret Kierkegaard as believing that each person is already unique because God is the one who gave everyone his or her unique characteristics. Such an interpretation implies a form of existential education which is about cultivating unique characteristics that are already in the individual. However, this is not the case. Distinctiveness reveals itself in relationships between God and between people. For example, in *Fear and trembling* Abraham’s distinctiveness is revealed in his faith to God. Abraham’s faith in God was so strong that he was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac. But then God stepped in and halted the sacrifice. This example makes it possible to say that Kierkegaard’s pseudonym de Silentio rejects every question about what people are. This is supported by Westphal (2008, p. 25), who says that Kierkegaard, like Levinas, contradicts Socrates’ idea that the learner already has the truth within. Rather, an absolute inestimable power, God, called Abraham who answered, and in the moment Abraham accepted the call, he had been singled out (see Davenport, 2008). In other words, we are singled out in the relationship with God, hence, in a way, it is God who makes us unique and distinctive.

Of course this form of existential education, which can be derived from Kierkegaard’s texts, is very specific. Nevertheless, we can see a certain relationship to a more modern form of education. In that context I think of Biesta’s (2009) three functions of education which, as he argues, can also be understood as three possible domains of educational purpose. One function of education has to do with qualification, in which the individual shall be qualified for something specific. It can, for example, be about qualifying the individual for a profession. Another function has to do with socialisation, where the purpose is to insert each individual into existing social, cultural, political and other orders. Neither of these two functions can be related to Kierkegaard’s existentialist view of education. He is not particularly interested in qualifying or socialisation. In fact, he argues that singularisation must take place outside any form of socialisation or cultivation. This means that we can place Kierkegaard’s existential education in the function Biesta (2009) describes as the subjectification function/ domain. Biesta (2009, p. 356) says that this function can best be understood as the opposite of the socialisation function of education. The reason is that the individual should not be part of an already existing order, but should rather become independent from such orders. It would be wrong to talk about an objective truth when it comes to the subjectification of people. Rather, it is a matter of subjective truth. The difference between these two forms of truth is as follows. On the one hand, we can imagine the person qualifying as a doctor. It is essential that a doctor knows the objective truth about the human anatomy for instance. Therefore, a medical education, similar to other educations, must contain a great deal of qualification, where medical students must strive to get the objective content right. When it comes to existence and how to live life, however, one must think differently. One cannot tell the person that s/he must live in a certain way. Of course one can point out some ways for the person, but, and this is the salient point for Kierkegaard (1846/1992),
the individual must choose on his or her own. As soon as the existential choice is made, the individual must appropriate the truth, inscribe it in his or her life (see ibid.). This is no universally valid truth, but rather an existential truth, or, what Caputo (2008, p. 61) refers to as “the truth that is true for me.”

INDIRECT PEDAGOGY VERSUS DIRECT PEDAGOGY

How, then, is it possible to teach in accordance with such existential matters? To address this question I relate to Kierkegaard’s distinction between direct and indirect communication. To communicate directly with reference to existential issues is, according to Kierkegaard (1846/1992, p. 75), a deception, not only against God but also against oneself and another person. The reason is that the direct communication presupposes certainty and result, something the existential can never be reduced to. That is why I introduce the concept of indirect pedagogy which suggests a discreet and indirect approach to existential concerns. What, really, does that mean? Let me offer a couple of examples, as an attempt to give a picture of the concept of indirect pedagogy.

By giving aesthetic devices a prominent place, for example in the form of pictures, literature, music, one speaks to a large degree to the sensual and the emotional. The strength of such aesthetic devices is that they are both seductive and deceptive and they often affect the whole existence of people. Therefore they can extend people’s contact with their surroundings, which indicates that the aesthetic devices speak to other aspects of people rather than the logic and concept orientated aspects. We cannot simply decide that we like an aesthetic expression or not: either its quality strikes us or it does not, and this may even happen independently of what we on a rational plane think about the aesthetic expression. Said differently, the aesthetic devices are context dependent, as that which fascinates one person does not necessarily have the same effect upon another. This does not exclude, of course, that any form of aesthetic experience is related to the beholder’s knowledge, prior experience, mood, and the like.

Yet, the chances of a successful pedagogy are probably better the more one knows a person. In other words, it is an advantage, in light of indirect pedagogy, to have a certain knowledge about that which really means something in a student’s life. Therefore, the teacher should, in certain contexts, begin where the students are, something Kierkegaard (1859/1998) realised. This is very demanding, as the teacher must learn to know the student properly in order to find his or her place. However, we must not forget that little is more comical than adult people trying to talk the same language as young people, for example by taking a starting point in popular cultural references that, from the young people’s perspective, are totally passé.

There is also, I believe, the strong possibility of seducing or catching the student’s attention if the teacher, as I am about to argue in Chapter 3, provides a break in the pattern of the picture presentation by, for example, introducing a picture where the content is very different from the other pictures. Again, this is entirely dependent on the recipient, but as Kierkegaard says in one of his journals,
to relieve a formal treatment of aesthetic topics in a presentation with less formal and lighter elements can have an educational effect (see Kjaer, 1986, p. 55). Such a change in the presentation can be compared with, says Kierkegaard, the chorus in a song or the comic parts in a romantic drama, where the effect can make a situation become more concrete and ordinary (ibid.). In this way it may be possible to capture the student’s attention. This is, of course, only an example of how indirect pedagogy as seduction may function in practice. There are no predetermined methods of how to seduce in the best possible way. I have only tried to point out that aesthetic devices can be seductive in themselves, and that the seduction can be further enhanced by presenting the aesthetic devices in discreet and indirect ways. But that said, one can never ignore the fact that any form of seduction is dependent on the recipients and the context.

The teacher who narrates and fails to seduce will always have a large handicap. The narration will probably not find its way to the students. Although we should not underestimate the seductiveness of dry and direct narration (see Kierkegaard, 1846/1992, pp. 516–517), the idea, from a Kierkegaardian perspective, is that the narration must be so seductive that the receiver experiences him- or herself as being a participant. This is evident in Kierkegaard’s very first book, where he criticises the writings of Hans Christian Andersen. Indirectly Kierkegaard says that Andersen, who is best known as a writer of fairy tales, is a bad teacher because he, time and again, steps out of the narration to comment and explain (Kierkegaard, 1838/1997, pp. 24–25). One might even say that Andersen clings to a direct pedagogy. Therefore, he does not manage to pull his reader into the narrative, thus positioning the reader as a spectator to the event (ibid., pp. 41, 51). Kierkegaard himself does not, in my view, lack the power of narration. Of course, one cannot just say that a particular author is seductive. There are many factors that come into play, such as the reader’s experience, mood and so on. However, when Kierkegaard is at his best it is as if the readers are swept into the worlds of fictional people. It is as if we are on the inside of a drama where we feel like participants rather than spectators. Kierkegaard’s own narratives are sometimes so seductive that they are capable of sending the reader into a drama that s/he cannot control. To be even more precise: the seductive and the aesthetic narrative can send the subject in two directions, out towards the narrative itself and down towards a passion that can be connected to the narrative. One can say that the narrative has swept the reader into the drama that consequently has awakened the passion of the person. In this manner the narrative has presented an existential choice where the receiver can choose to be made anew, or not.
CHAPTER 2

TIME FOR EXISTENTIAL EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

A large part of today’s educational activities are characterised by clear educational aims, in order to ensure that the connection between teaching and learning outcomes is safe and secure (Biesta, 2009). As such we are within the area of education which is related to qualification, that is, students are supposed to qualify for something, be it a trade, a profession or the like. This is also one of the main reasons that one, in this area of education, is concerned with the transfer of knowledge, skills, values and the like. Students should be able to master something concrete, such as reading, numeracy, using digital tools, etc. The qualification function, which to a great extent reduces education to an instrumental tool, must necessarily be part of education, but there is reason to ask whether education has other functions than this.

In a strict sense, education has three functions (Biesta, 2009, p 355). The qualification function is one. Another is the socialising function, the aim being that individuals should, through educational processes, become part of existing socio-cultural, political, religious and moral norms (ibid.). They should in other words be socialised into something that is already established, some kind of essence (cf. Sartre, 2007).

A third function of education is a matter of subjectification (Biesta, 2009, p. 356). Through educational activities the teacher may contribute to the subjectification of children and young people. As I underlined in Chapter 1, this function is very different from the two above-mentioned functions, as it has nothing to do with essence (ibid.). It is rather associated with existence, as it is about acting as independent individuals, that is, independent of any norms and structures of the socialisation function.

Whether all forms of education contribute to subjectification is a controversial question. While some argue that the subjectification function is more or less excluded from educational activities and that the qualification and socialisation functions are most prominent (cf. Hostetler, 2005), others argue that virtually all forms of education lead to some form of subjectification (cf. Fischman, DiBara & Gardner, 2006). I think that the latter standpoint is rather naïve and will thus argue that not all educational activities contribute to the subjectification process. This is supported by John Dewey, who—in the article Time and individuality (1940)—states the following:
The contingency of all into which time enters is the source of pathos, comedy, and tragedy. Genuine time, if it exists as anything else except the measure of motions in space, is all one with the existence of individuals as individuals, with the creative, with the occurrence of unpredictable novelties. Everything that can be said contrary to this conclusion is but a reminder that an individual may lose his individuality, for individuals become imprisoned in routine and fall to the level of mechanisms. Genuine time then ceases to be an integral element in their being. Our behaviour becomes predictable because it is but an external rearrangement of what went before. (Dewey, 1998, p. 225)

Indirectly Dewey is criticising what we may refer to as ‘inauthentic’ time, which is really a spatial understanding of time. This is so-called clock time, in which time is structured and thus also predicted. That is also why Dewey criticises this concept of time. Specifically, Dewey’s criticism is addressed to the rigid and mechanical structure of time; or, that which forces the individual to relate to a predefined future. The consequence is that individuals are deprived of their existential freedom and independence, in other words, individuals will end up being time’s slave, as they are existing within a time pattern that is already structured and predefined. Through the Deweyan concept of genuine time, however, individuals will be able to free themselves from time’s dominance. Instead of being subjected to time’s rules, individuals are free to be creative. Thus individuals will appear as independent and a subject of time, just because they are able to influence time by way of their creativity and originality (cf. Pamental, 2010, p. 155).

By including time in this way, Dewey is highlighting a very important topic that is not much discussed in education. Furthermore, he makes room for asking questions about ‘quality’ with regard to education, particularly in relation to the subjectification function. What’s interesting about Dewey’s article is that it uses time as a foundation for such an analysis of quality. Like Dewey, I wish to argue that the conception of time is crucial as to whether individuals may become independent or not. If the teacher has a spatial concept of time as the basis for the teaching, it will not be possible, according to Dewey, like one of his successors, Richard Rorty, to contribute to such a goal. Dewey rather suggests that the teacher must relate to genuine time.

So far we stand with two assertions: (1) a spatial concept of time cannot be the basis for the education function that involves existential questions, in which subjectification is the most prominent aspect; (2) in order for subjectification to happen, teaching should have genuine time as a basis, that is, a concept of time that is related to the contingent and the non-calculable aspects of life. In addition to these two assertions, I would like to introduce a third one. That assertion is revealed by placing Dewey and Rorty in an ethico-existential quality frame. The assertion reads as follows: (3) Dewey’s (and to some extent Rorty’s) time concept gives rise to creative and artistic individuals who are forming themselves as human beings, but the same concept of time closes the door for the ethico-existential
TIME FOR EXISTENTIAL EDUCATION

dimension, where responsibility for fellow humans are the central aspect (Levinas, 1985, 1989a, 2003).

Therefore I wish, with respect to the analysis of quality within education, to engage with Emmanuel Levinas, the reason being that Levinas’s thinking makes it possible to talk about subjectification that is related to a form of time that occurs indirectly through acts of responsibility. Thus the subjectification function is given an ethico-existential dimension that goes beyond Dewey’s and Rorty’s conceptions of individuality, and of course the kind of educational activities related to a spatial understanding of time, what I refer to as direct pedagogy.

The argumentative structure of this chapter looks like this: In the first section I redescribe Dewey’s ideas about time and individuality (which is not, as we shall see in the last two sections, the same as subjectivity). I limit myself to the article *Time and individuality*, as it is the most concrete Dewey wrote about time in light of education’s preoccupation with the individualising of people. In the same section I give a couple of examples where I compare the qualification function with the function that has to do with subjectification. I do this to support the assertion that a form of education which is related to a spatial concept of time makes it impossible to attain subjectification. In the second section I engage with Rorty, as he continues and re-contextualises Dewey’s educational philosophy. Another reason is that Rorty in 1989 published an educational article—*Education as socialization and individualization*—where he discusses both socialisation and individualisation in light of education. This provides a basis for comparing the socialisation function with the subjectification function. The analysis will therefore be conducted so that it circles around the subjectification function, as it is discussed in light of the two other functions; namely, the qualification and socialisation functions of education. This will give us a relatively broad understanding of the three functions. The purpose of this section is still to argue that any form of educational activity which is based on a spatial concept of time will end up enforcing the individual into a predetermined pattern, instead of creating independent individuals. In the third and fourth sections I shall try to show that Rorty, like Dewey, keeps open the possibility of creating independent and individual persons, while neglecting the ethico-existential dimension. This is why I turn to Levinas, as his concept of time provides a process of subjectification in which the ethico-existential dimension is included. The concept of time can thus be regarded as an analytic tool, as selected time concepts help to determine whether the educational activity may contribute to subjectification or not; however, it is also probable that different concepts of time will contribute to various forms of subjectification. That we may see by placing Dewey and Rorty into an ethico-existential quality frame.

Even if I use some examples from schools, the purpose of this chapter goes beyond that which has to do with practical school activities. The purpose of this chapter is rather to lead an educational-theoretical discussion of the concept of time in relation to education’s subjectification function.
DEWEY, QUALIFICATION, AND TIME

Once the curriculum makes its aims very explicit, as exemplified by competence aims which specify and direct what students should be able to master, then the teaching would be based on spatial thinking; or, specifically, a classical geometric perspective of space, and why? Because the educational activity will be based on an idea that the future can be predicted. At first glance it may seem that this is a time aspect, and not a spatial concern, as the curriculum points to the future. However, this has nothing to do with time. It is rather a matter of a spatialised concept of time, which further reduces the concept of time by relating it to Euclidean geometry. This will also reduce the concept of space as the only thing that matters is the measuring of things. In fact, space in itself is a very complex concept (Levinas, 2009, pp. 179f.), which I unfortunately can not elaborate in this book. Rather, I will look closer at the concept of space which is reduced to something tangible or something that can be perceived quite unproblematic (Levinas, 1987, p 129). The reason being that the predominance of contemporary Western education is based on such a concept of space.

Let me take a concrete example. Over the past few years, learning has become one of the key concepts in education (Biesta, 2006). Of course, learning is a complex concept, which holds many different definitions, but the learning concept also has, and this is something that politicians and others have understood, a close relation to the rhetoric of effectiveness and outcomes, that is, a spatial conception of the learning concept. In several countries, the concept of learning outcomes is commonly used. Thus the educational activity becomes very focused on aims, that is, quite explicit and clear aims. The reason is that investors want to make sure that what they have invested in schools, primarily in the form of funds and manpower, can provide concrete and effective results (Robeyns, 2006).

The problem, in light of the subjectification function, is that such a form of educational activity, which is based on a spatial understanding of time, is blocking both artistic creation and future innovations. The assertion is supported by Dewey:

To regiment artists, to make them servants of some particular cause does violence to the very springs of artistic creation, but it does more than that. It betrays the very cause of a better future it would serve, for in its subjection of the individuality of the artist it annihilates the source of that which is genuinely new. (Dewey, 1998, p. 226)

Suppose the teacher bases teaching on a spatial concept of time, what then? It would be very problematic in terms of subjectification as the teacher would be guided by rationality and common sense (cf. Fallace, 2010, p. 131). In such situations, where educational activities are highly predictable, artistic creation and that which is genuinely new can not enter the world.

Let me further substantiate the assertion through a specific example from one area of education; namely, assessment. Assessment is very prevalent in today’s school activities because of its strong profit orientation (Siegel, 2004). This has also led to the fact that many educators have investigated this area, after which,
among other things, the idea of ‘feedback’ has been challenged. In recent times, several educators have introduced the concept of ‘feedforward’ (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Hattie, 2009). Since the assessor points out which direction the student must go, in order to reach the specified aim, the concept of feedforward is strongly related to the spatial concept of time. In other words, as the assessor points forward, into the future, we are left with a predicted future. This is not only a reduced conception of the future, but it is also highly problematic in terms of subjectification and existential issues. The reason is as follows: as soon as the assessor guides the student into a predicted future, the student does not need to doubt where he or she should go. With this, the danger of blocking the student’s future or opportunities to exist in new and independent ways arises.

So, is this particular concept of time totally worthless? No, and this is also a question of quality. For example, to place the spatial concept of time in the frame of the qualification function of education would not cause many problems. Teaching students that $2 + 2 = 4$, that they must first cross the road at a green light etc., does not require a particularly sophisticated concept of time. Such instrumental aspects of educational activities, that is, aspects that are possible to master, can very well relate to a spatial concept of time, in which the teacher can directly and explicitly point out the direction for the student. On the other hand, there are areas in education which are not possible to master, such as existential concerns. That is also why a spatial concept of time falls short in terms of the subjectification function, a claim that I want to further support, this time by way of Rorty.

RORTY, SOCIALISATION, AND TIME

One of the reasons for engaging with Rorty is that he brings a new perspective to the analysis in that he introduces education’s socialisation function. This will give us a broader framework of understanding when it comes to the subjectification function. In order for the analysis of quality in relation to the latter function to be as educationally relevant as possible, we must have an understanding of two conditions. First, we must have an understanding of Rorty’s basic notions of education, and secondly, we must have an understanding of his perception of time.

In the final chapter of the book *Philosophy and the mirror of nature* Rorty stresses that he relates to the tradition of *Bildung*. As a philosopher, he is therefore educationally oriented, even though he prefers to use the concept of ‘edification’ (Rorty, 1980, p. 360). This concept is then placed into education’s individualisation function. For example, he states that the most important thing is to redescribe ourselves as human beings: “ redescribing ourselves is the most important thing we can do” (ibid., pp. 358–359). At the same time the individual must have knowledge about culture and history, meaning that the individual should be cultivated and socialised, but only to redescribe and reinterpret the cultural and historical heritage, meaning that the individual should also be individualised. In order to realise this socialisation and individualisation process, the person must have a certain attitude, that is, “an attitude interested not so much in what is out there in the world, or in
what happened in history, as in what we can get out of nature and history for our own uses” (ibid., p. 359). When individuals redescribe history and the past, as Rorty urges, then they will simultaneously redescribe themselves. In such an individualisation process, individuals will be free and independent, as they appear to be time’s subjects, rather than being dictated by time.

In the case of Rorty’s concept of time, we have to derive it ourselves, as he, unlike Dewey, did not define and concretise the concept of time. A good starting point in this respect is the last chapter of Philosophy and the mirror of nature. Therein Rorty touches upon a concept of time which is reminiscent of Dewey’s. That is partly because Rorty here denies a spatial and teleological view of time, which he does by relating to a past that does not have an origin: “there is no […] common ground” (Rorty, 1980, p. 364). Origo has no place in Rorty’s conception of time; there is absolutely no starting point to find there. Nor is there an endpoint in his view of time, a claim which is supported thus: “The only point on which I would insist is that philosophers’ moral concern should be with continuing the conversation of the West” (ibid., p. 394). Once the individual has reinterpreted and redescribed certain parts of the past, new opportunities for redescriptions do arise. The past does not end knocking on our door, hence the individualisation and education process never comes to an end.

Herein lies the strength of Rorty, as I see it. The reason for saying this is that he has a view of time which makes it possible for individuals to free themselves from habits, routines and mechanical actions, in contrast to a spatialised conception of time (cf. Dewey, 1998, p. 225). In short, Rorty’s concept of time creates room for individuality, as opposed to a traditional teacher. Whereas traditional teachers have a specific plan for their recipients, specifying both a starting point and an endpoint, Rorty appears as a teacher who locates his recipients in a historical archive that contains infinite possibilities. In consequence, traditional teachers make it impossible for an individualisation process to occur, as they deal with a spatial and teleological concept of time. The Rortian a-teleological conception of time, on the other hand, allows for a type of education in which each individual must find their own way in the ‘chaos’ of the past (Rorty, 1999). Individuals must, in other words, make choices, and then create their own individual Bildungsroman by redescribing the past (ibid.). As such, individuals have been both socialised and individualised, notably without being pressed into some form of social order. This means that each individual can exist freely, within the framework of culture and history.

Rorty’s perspectives, both in accordance with time and education, have so far helped to support my first two assertions. Nonetheless, there are some educational problems here, problems that are particularly related to the socialisation and individualisation functions. The problems are particularly prominent in the article Education as socialization and individualization. It is certainly worth having a closer look at this particular article, as it highlights issues that will strengthen my assertion that individualisation requires what Dewey refers to as genuine time. In this article, which, to my knowledge was the only text Rorty specifically wrote about education, he argues quite radically and unorthodoxly that students need to be socialised until they are 19 years of age. Not until that age can they start
individualising themselves, mainly by directing a critical look at the historical knowledge they so far have acquired. Rorty:

It would be well for the colleges to remind us that 19 is an age when young people should have finished absorbing the best that has been thought and said and should have started becoming suspicious of it. (Rorty, 1999, p. 124)

Here we find a weakness in Rorty’s concept of education. The weakness is revealed as he points out that students should be socialised until the age of 19. From early on in life and up until this age the individual should absorb the best that has been thought and said. On this basis, I would say that Rorty falls at the feet of a spatialised concept of time, with the consequence that students are deprived of their individuality right up to the age of 19. As I see it, teachers can not put the process of individualisation on hold until the students are 19.

To substantiate my claim, I will actually use Rorty against himself, as there is a paradox in his thinking about education. The paradox is that he on one side relates to Dewey’s statement “if you take care of freedom, truth will take care of itself” (Rorty, 1999, p. 118). Before Dewey, the opposite belief was the case, according to Rorty: “if you have truth, freedom will follow automatically” (ibid., p. 114). So, before Dewey, truth was transferred to the individual, upon which truth would bring the individual to freedom. After Dewey, however, freedom came first, upon which truth would take care of itself. If we take Rorty at his word, then I would state that the individualisation process must precede the process of socialisation or that which is about adapting to culture and society. This Rorty, who is somehow hidden in the text, turns against the other Rorty who claims the opposite: “Socialization has to come before individuation, and education for freedom cannot begin before some constraints have been imposed” (Rorty, 1999, p. 118).

When the teacher places individualisation and freedom before socialisation, the students will, according to Dewey’s statement, seek out truth and start socialising themselves. But for this to be possible, educationally, teachers must free themselves from the spatialised concept of time, while relating to a concept of time that Dewey, and Rorty at his best, highlights. Then it would be possible for teachers to create the best conditions for children and young people to become creative and imaginative without direct intervention. Rather than just being cultivated and socialised into a given order, children and young people must be given opportunities to make their own experiences, after which they can find their own place in the societal and cultural landscape. By redescribing Rorty in this way, it may be stated that teachers have the following educational task ahead of them: in contrast to only transmitting cultural heritage to students, teachers should keep the possibility open for students to create their own Bildungsromans by redescribing history and cultural heritage.

Yet this is far from the final conclusion of this chapter. Both the Deweyan and the Rortian concepts of time are certainly preferable when it comes to questions about individualisation, precisely because these concepts have the power and the ability to individualise each and every individual, as opposed to a spatial conception of time, which forces the individual into an already established sense.
CHAPTER 2

So far I follow Dewey and Rorty, but the main problem with their view of time, radically speaking, is that it relates to creativity, artistry and poetic creation. In this way, the individual becomes an individual who differs from all others, but the consequence of that, and this I shall argue in more detail, is that the ethico-existential responsibility is annulled. Let me now, with the help of Levinas’s conception of time, argue further for this third assertion, so as to make room for the ethico-existential dimension of the subjectification function.

LEVINAS, SUBJECTIFICATION, AND EXISTENTIAL TIME

We must not overlook, though, that neither Dewey nor Rorty are servants of the Cartesian cogito, where everything is seen and understood in the light of consciousness (cf. Derrida, 1992, 1994; Levinas, 1990, 1998a). Dewey, for example, is radically open to uncertainty and contingency; or, that which comes at us from outside of consciousness. Dewey: “Individuality conceived as a temporal development involves uncertainty, indeterminacy, or contingency. Individuality is the source of whatever is unpredictable in the world” (Dewey, 1998, p. 224). Rorty says almost the same where he describes “freedom as the recognition of contingency” (Rorty, 1989, p. 26). It is not the individual’s consciousness that controls the individualisation process, after which the individual lets itself be guided by conventions, habits and routines. On the contrary, it is the contingent, the uncertain, and that which we can not predict which individualises us as humans. Both Dewey (1998) and Rorty (1980, 1989, 1999) relate to a concept of time which leads to a form of individuality where each person stands out as unique and different in relation to other individuals. This is, when it comes down to it, their definition of individuality. Where Rorty, for example, is preoccupied with the fear of just being a copy of others, rather than being unique and different (Rorty, 1989, p. 24), Dewey (1998, p. 224) speaks about Abraham Lincoln and how time shaped him into an individual person, distinctive from all others.

What both ignore is that their conceptions of time entail the danger of not wanting to take responsibility for the Other. This is an important factor because, according to Levinas (1987), time, or what I refer to as ‘existential time,’ occurs through responsibility for the Other. What’s most interesting, and quite original, is that Levinas relates time to the Other; or, more precisely, the Other’s otherness, which is both contingent and non-calculable (ibid., pp. 30–31). Such a view of time leads to a different perspective on existence and subjectivity, compared to Dewey and Rorty. Levinas (2000, p. 29) provides an important clue: "the fact of being irreplaceable in responsibility for the Other defines me, as me and as unique me [moi]." It is not about individuals being different from all others. What then? The key word is irreplaceability. In certain situations we experience that the Other, or time itself, is calling us, and no other. No one can take your place and your responsibility. If you accept the call, you are led into an existential and ethical sphere, after which existential time may occur (Levinas, 1987, p. 36). Thus the individual has appeared as unique in the sense that no one else could have
addressed this particular call. This briefly explains Levinas’s concept of subjectivity.

When Dewey and Rorty are placed into the ethico-existential quality framework, then we may perceive that their concepts of time take a different direction. Their concepts of time lead us into the sphere where everyone can be a human being in their own individual way, but without having to pay attention to the Other, which, according to Levinas (2000), is that which defines us as unique individuals. In both Dewey’s and Rorty’s views on individuality we can trace a lack of responsibility. Dewey (1998, p. 226), on his side, is highlighting “creative activity,” but to express oneself creatively has basically nothing to do with responsibility. One may easily be creative, but without having to pay attention to one’s fellow man. Dewey’s view of individuality excludes, in other words, ethical categories, such as responsibility, justice and kindness. Rorty, on his side, goes so far as to say that individuals must have an attitude that is based on what we can get out of nature and history “for our own uses” (Rorty, 1980, p. 359). As such, the contingent aspect will only be a means for the individual’s own use. This is, as I see it, a self-centred form of existence. The consequence of omitting the time of the Other is that existential time will be annulled. So how may existential time occur?

In a new preface to the book Time and the Other Levinas speaks of “[t]he ‘movement’ of time understood as transcendence toward the Infinity of the ‘wholly other’” (Levinas, 1987, p. 33). Time understood in a chronological and linear sense, that is, a spatial understanding of time, is therefore not applicable for Levinas. Instead, it is about undertaking “a detour by entering into the ethical adventure of the relationship to the other person” (ibid., p. 33). In this way Levinas accommodates time to the Other, which is not only different from one’s own time, but is also able to stop and suspend one’s own rhythm and temporality, in which the person may be pulled out of a private existence and into an ethico-existential relationship, with the result that existential time occurs (ibid., pp. 35–36).

This background further reveals that the time concepts of Dewey and Rorty are blocking the time of the Other. The reason being that they focus on, respectively, creative expression and redescriptions of the past, thus giving rise to a self-willed individual who ends up in a private existence. One can not deny that students can be individualised through Dewey’s and Rorty’s conceptions of time, but in an ethico-existential sense there is a danger here; that is, the individual may close the door with regard to the Other’s time and otherness. In Levinas, on the contrary, the person is pulled into a form of existence where responsibility for the Other has priority. Thus Levinas’s ethical philosophy belongs to the Western humanistic tradition (Levinas, 2006). However, we must not confuse this with a form of humanism in which the individual is preoccupied with his or her own quest for individuality, understood as freedom or autonomy. Rather, Levinas (2006) suggests a humanism of the Other.

When describing ethics in this way, Dewey’s (1998) concept of time is inadequate, because—even though he develops new ideas about the concept of time, partly on the basis of Henri Bergson and William James—he has not managed to liberate himself from the Enlightenment idea wherein each individual
has the right to freedom and self-expression (Levinas, 1987, p. 34). The consequence is that Dewey, through his insistence on creative expression, will be in danger of blocking the time of the Other. This will also block the Other’s possibilities for an ethical existence. In Levinas, the subject is not autonomous, but heteronomous, as the subject is subjected to the Other (Kodelja, 2008; Levinas, 1985, 1989a). That is, the subject is called and challenged by the Other, after which the subject is faced with a responsibility not asked for (Levinas, 2009). The subject is not the initiator of the responsibility; on the contrary, the subject is accused by the Other (ibid.). Thus the subject does not know others through him- or herself, as one usually thinks. Rather, the subject knows him- or herself through (the responsibility for) the Other (cf. Kangas & Kavka, 2008). Education’s task is thus not an exercise in vigilance, as seen in the cogito tradition, but rather an exercise in being open to the otherness of the Other (cf. Derrida, 2001).

This background suggests that the main criticism of both Dewey and Rorty is that they operate with a concept of time which is relevant for individualisation, but the drawback is that these conceptions of time do not take into account the dimension of ethical existence. Thus they only create room for individuals who are primarily concerned with caring for themselves, rather than caring for other people. Levinas, however, articulates a concept of time which opens for ego patiens, where the subject appears as the invoked and the accused. In short we can say that Levinas’s subject is Other-oriented, after which it is possible to come into existential time and, as such, appear as an independent and ethical individual.

Despite the fact that I have directed some criticism towards Dewey, I wish to add that Time and individuality is very important with respect to various aspects of education. In this particular article Dewey discusses time mainly as a problem; or, more specifically, problems that arise when time is associated with individuality (Dewey, 1998, p. 219). So have I, but now it’s time to think of time as a specific and educational function for subjectification. I shall in other words attempt to contextualise the problems discussed so far, that is, I am about to localise them in a specific educational context. I do this in order to concretise my thoughts, but first and foremost to bring further support to the assertion that Dewey’s and Rorty’s concepts of time, what we may refer to as ‘pragmatic time,’ deny the ethico-existential dimension. My final question is thus: What kind of education will we end up with by using, on one side, a pragmatic conception of time, and, on the other, an existential conception of time?

CONCLUSIONS: TACT AND EXISTENTIAL SUBJECTIVITY

Existential time is a kind of denial of death, which Levinas defines as “the no-response” (Levinas, 2000, p. 9; emphasis in the original; Derrida, 2001, p. 203). For example, when the student as the Other does not answer, when there is no response, existential time does not occur, and this is a form of death or non-existence. The same thing happens when, for example, the teacher tries to hush down the student, which may happen whenever the teacher defines what it means to be a free and independent individual in advance. Thus the teacher does not let
the student have a say in terms of his or her wishes and dreams, or other existential matters. In such cases the teacher actually chooses, though perhaps unconsciously, to stand outside existential time, which is a form of death; non-existence. Accordingly, it is in the best interest of education to make space for students’ responses, as responding is a kind of responsible action (Säfström, 2003; Todd, 2008). Moreover, such acts define us, according to Levinas (2000, p. 29), as unique individuals. In other words, this is a form of ‘existential subjectification.’

At the same time this form of educational activity is not structured in a spatial perspective, but rather in a time perspective. One could perhaps say that this form of education concerns a particular kind of tact, which was introduced to education (Pädagogik) by Johann Friedrich Herbart (Benner, 1993). Tact does not necessarily have anything to do with knowledge (van Manen, 2002, p. 217). One can well imagine a knowledgeable teacher who is not tactful. Of course you can turn the claim on its head and say that a knowledgeable teacher is both sensitive and tender, that is to say tactful, but the point is that tact is not a competency which can be learned in a straightforward fashion, nor is it a technique or a method that everyone can use in any context (ibid., p. 219). Tact does not have its origin either in rules, habits or established practices (ibid., p. 224). Thus, so far, there is no difference between Dewey and Rorty on one side and Levinas on the other.

If we begin by looking at pragmatic time, then we will see that this concept contradicts the idea that it is possible to predict what true subjectivity is. Such a predictive attitude confirms the idea that one can only be a subjectified individual under the teacher’s authority and strict orders, which is a form of direct pedagogy (cf. Lovlie, 2002, p. 336). Dewey and Rorty, on the contrary, make room for the contingent and the non-predictable in life, which will, from the teacher’s point of view, entail that any teacher must set boundaries for his or her own entry into the lives of others, rather than setting clear limits and restrictions for others. In fact, the concept of tact clarifies this, as it refers to the boundaries one must not step over in relation to one’s fellow man.” If the teacher’s will overrides the student’s will, if he or she only deals with a spatialised and predetermined view of subjectivity, the students will be objectified and stripped of their subjectivity. For this reason, the teacher must be tactful, which, according to Dewey and Rorty, will consist in opening up for life’s contingencies, so that each student can stand forth as a unique and distinctive individual.

By taking this background with us into the description of what it means to be a tactful teacher in light of Levinas’s concept of time, some differences will be revealed, which in turn support the assertion that the pragmatic concept of time is insufficient when it comes to ethical existence. It is important to note that the tactful teacher shall not produce or cultivate the student’s subjectivity through tact. Adopting an absolutely certain attitude of what it means to be human, leads to a form of pedagogy in which the all-knowing teacher is the one who shall develop the student’s freedom and subjectivity. Levinas (1987), however, teaches us, indirectly, that such pedagogy would undermine the Other’s time. Educationally spoken, the teacher would prevent the child and the student from coming into existence, wherein they could show who they are or who they want to be.
CHAPTER 2

Following the principle of coming into existence does however entail a great risk. The teacher can actually run the risk that nothing happens in this classroom. But that is a risk they must take, as the student’s subjectivity cannot be ‘produced’ by any other than themselves. One cannot compare education’s subjectification function with the transfer of knowledge, and then conduct a test that tries to specify the learning outcomes. Is not this uncertainty rather unfortunate? Actually no, as this uncertainty may force teachers to be more aware of their educational responsibilities (Biesta, 2009).

For example, the teacher may be aware that tact, in terms of subjectification, is not about solving a particular situation or the like. Rather, tact is to keep open the possibility that the student can be responsible for his or her own subjective truth. This perspective stands not only in sharp contrast to the teacher who is so clear and direct that he or she is in danger of shutting the door to any kind of subjectification process, but it also stands in sharp contrast to the concept of tact which can be derived on the basis of the pragmatic conception of time. In Dewey, as well as in Rorty, tact will, among other things, imply that the teacher should make room for the contingent, or that which defines each and every student as individual and singular. Levinas, however, puts the focus on responsibility, whereupon the person may be led into the ethico-existential sphere. That is the big difference between Levinas on the one hand and Dewey and Rorty on the other. The point being for Levinas is not to become different from all others; rather, it is about assuming responsibility for the Other (Levinas, 1987; Kangas & Kavka, 2008; Simon, 2003). Tact, in light of existential subjectification, is thus about preparing for something to happen. More specifically, and from the teacher’s point of view, it is about relating to the student’s time; however, I wish to add that the teacher must challenge this time, in order to create a room where the student is given the opportunity, notably on a voluntary basis, to take the leap into the existential sphere. As I said, there is no guarantee that such a form of subjectification will happen, but as long as the door is kept open there is such an opportunity, after which existential time can occur (without end).

Finally, tact is a specific form of indirect pedagogy. Other forms of such pedagogy are, for example, seduction, deception and irony. Let us therefore have a closer look at these forms of indirect pedagogy, starting with seduction.