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of Measurement**

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Abstract

Recently, in educational theory, criticism of Evidence-based Education (EBE) by Gert Biesta has been accepted academically as an important caution highlighting a specific risk that could exclude educational practices with non-EBE styles. This notion is based on idea of ‘evidence’ in education, that it should inevitably limit the width and depth of educational practices and lead to immobilization of inherent education potential. Thus, in this article, we explore the limits of EBE from the perspective of philosophy. We particularly focus on the educational philosopher Gert Biesta’s concept of “subjectification” and his critique of EBE.

Accordingly, our article consists of three parts. First, we briefly summarize the conceptual history of subjectivity and locate the Biesta’s thoughts on subjectification in the related history. Second, Biesta’s argument on the measurability of subjectification, which includes his implication of subjectification in citizenship education, is examined and clarified. Finally, we consider how Biesta’s conception of subjectification can be practical.

Keywords: Evidence-based Education, Gert Biesta, Subject, Subjectification, Citizenship Education

A Philosophical Study on Evidence-based Education and “Subjectification” Exploring a New Conception of Citizenship Education in an Age of Measurement

Introduction

‘Subjectification’ seems to be a pressing issue in contemporary education. In the knowledge society of the twenty-first century, there is no doubt that it is educational issues to be able to learn and act subjectively. However, the concept of “subject” is occasionally used with an unsophisticated understanding in educational research. Evidence-based Education (EBE) has particularly been rising internationally. The beginning of this is said to be Hargreaves’s lecture in 1996: “Teaching as research-based profession”. Hargreaves said that “we don’t have much powerful evidence about effective professional practice which indicates that the main problem is not with dissemination but at the other end of the research process: how the research is commissioned and set in train” (Hargreaves 2007: 9). So, EBE is developing as one which seeks to measure and evaluate the validity of educational practice.

However, EBE has been criticized from the perspective of educational philosophy. For example, Imai (2015: 189) asked “what is the evidence’s effect? what is evidence?” Imai also stated that “the evidence can have an effect because of not *being* but *being understood*”. Therefore, what are the problems which the evidence empowered has? To consider this question, Imai followed Biesta’s argument which focuses on the profession of teaching.

Biesta (2007) criticized that educational methodology is produced from the viewpoint of “what works”. According to Imai’s argument (2015:

192), this means that there is a risk of restricting a teacher’s practice. To develop the profession, teachers must surrender their freedom of action. However, this not only means losing their freedom of actions but also breaking democracy up, because it discard the possibility that the teaching’s method is produced without evidence.

As mentioned, Biesta demonstrated that evidence makes education predictable. Therefore, EBE makes the educational practice narrow-minded, fixed, and restricted. To criticize EBE, Biesta (2010) creates the idea ‘subjectification’ which means “the process of becoming a subject” and that can “be understood as the opposite of the socialization function” (Biesta 2010:21). In this paper, we will consider what Biesta’s ‘subjectification’ is, and whether we can evaluate ‘subjectification’ or not.

1. A Theory of ‘Subject’ in the Pedagogy after Postmodernism

This section tries to see the theory of ‘subject’ in Biesta in the context of the history of philosophy. Here we confirm Michel Foucault’s ‘the end of man’ theory because Biesta refers to it.

Les mot et les chose, which Foucault published in 1966, deals with the human sciences. In particular, ‘the end of man’ is an important concept criticizing modern ‘man’ or ‘subject’. Foucault claims “[b]efore the end of the eighteenth century, *man* did not exist..... He is a quite recent creature, which the demiurge of knowledge fabricated with its own hands less than two hundred years ago” (Foucault

1970: 336). Moreover, “[m]an was constituted at the beginning of the nineteenth century” (Foucault 1970: 359).

‘The end of man’ means the end of ‘man’ formed in the early nineteenth century. According to Foucault, psychoanalysis, cultural ethnology and linguistics are ‘counter-sciences’ that makes man end. Therefore,

it is being led back, by those strange bobbins, to the forms of its birth, to the homeland that made it possible. And is that not one way of bringing about its end? For linguistics no more speak of man himself that do psychoanalysis and ethnology. (Foucault 1970: 416)

These fields criticised modern ethnology that places man above God after Nietzsche’s ‘death of God’ and makes ‘man’ itself end (Foucault 1970: 420). Foucault called this notion ‘the end of man’ (Foucault 1970: 420).

Gert Biesta began his career with studies on Foucault’s philosophy and the meaning of ‘subject’ in education. Biesta argued that pedagogy needed theories which did not use humanism in 1998. He stated that ‘the end of man’ can be understood as arguments on “a crisis of the subject” or “a crisis of modern man” (Biesta 1998: 7). Biesta examines Foucault’s theory of enlightenment and argues that it is intended to consider ‘enlightenment without humanism’.

Foucault seeks to further the impetus of Enlightenment without the certainty or guarantee of any deep truth about what the subject is,

without, in short, *humanism*. (Biesta 1998: 9)

For example, ‘zoon politikon’ is also a human definition but even it is humanistic because it defines human nature. The subject has to be grasped as “intersubjectivity” (Biesta 1998: 10). Such a concept “cannot take recourse to an original nature of the subject (not even its social or political nature)..... In this sense, it is a *pedagogy without humanism*” (Biesta 1998: 13).

Biesta’s arguments on ‘subject’ are developed into the concept of ‘subjectification’ in his recent philosophy. These theories seem to be postmodern thought because such a theory of subject is based on Foucault. However, this paper tries to grasp Biesta’s ‘subjectification’ as a concept *after* postmodernism.

In his book, *Beyond Learning* (2006), Biesta discusses ‘education after [the] death of subject’. Of course, this ‘subject’ is the modern meaning and the ‘death of subject’ is a concept that criticizes modern subject using Foucault. Biesta attempted to overcome the modern subject and re-grasp it as a concept that has a responsibility (as a possibility of response). This subject is based on Emmanuel Lévinas’s theory of the Other and ethics.

While Levinas would therefore agree that the subject comes into presence in an intersubjective space, he takes this idea one step further by arguing that the subject as a unique and singular “being,” as a “oneself,” comes into presence because it finds itself in a situation where it cannot be replaced by anyone else.....My subjectivity is a subjection to the other..... (Biesta 2006: 52)

Here, it seems that Biesta aims to re-conceive the subject in an ethical way of being, in relationship with the Other. We should focus on his concept of 'subjectation'. It is well known that 'assujettissement' is a concept that was argued by Louis Althusser or Foucault. This concept means that ideology or power make people obey and subjectify. This concept is based on the double meaning of 'subject' (cf. Althusser 1995: 302ff.; Foucault 1976: 81) but Biesta argued that there are different kinds of subjectation. He suggested what it means to be a subject, with possibilities of response to the Other. Therefore, his concept of 'subjectification' can be seen as a discourse of post-structuralism.

However, Biesta's recent interest concerns *after* postmodernism. In 2018, Biesta claimed "[n]ow that the enthusiasm for postmodernism has more or less come to an end, the question emerges as to what comes next" and "an idea also present in the current discourse about 'post-truth'" is brought "with epistemological relativism" (Biesta 2018: 1570). Therefore, we should not "say that all knowledge is relative, but to highlight the challenge - the ethical, political and existential challenge - of *living together in plurality*" (Biesta 2018: 1570). Therefore, Biesta tried to overcome postmodernism and develop the ethics of education.

Biesta's interest concerns after postmodernism. His key concept of 'subjectification' makes us that it overcomes some limits of postmodernism and modern education and seeks an ethical mode of 'subject'. Can we understand Biesta's 'subjectification' as such a concept? In the following sections, this paper will consider the relationship between 'subjectification' and EBE, and discuss the

ethical mode of education.

2. Biesta's Concept of 'Subjectification' and its Immeasurability

The preceding section indicated the potential of Biesta's concept of subjectification. In this section the meaning of Biesta's subjectification will be clarified, and a problem with the evaluation of that subjectification will be considered.

Biesta argues that there are three functions of education: 'Qualification', 'Socialization' and 'Subjectification' (Biesta 2010: 19).

The function of qualification provides knowledge, skills, and understanding to the person receiving education, and helps them to adopt the form, character, and judgment which makes it possible to take a particular job or profession (Biesta 2010: 19-20). The function of socialization is to make people part of particular social, cultural, and political 'orders' by the transmission of particular norms and values through education (Biesta 2010: 20). The function of subjectification is related to the process by which individuals become subjects, and 'it is precisely not about the insertion of "newcomers" into existing orders, but about ways of being that hint at independence from such orders' (Biesta 2010: 21). Among these three functions of education, Biesta particularly emphasised the importance of the function of subjectification as he captures it as 'an intrinsic element of all education' (Biesta 2010: 75).

Furthermore, Biesta argued that subjectification has particularly important meanings in citizenship education (Biesta 2010: 42-43). For example, in 'The Ignorant Citizen' (2011b), he discussed 'political subjectivity' in the context of citizenship

education based on arguments of radical democracy such as Jacques Rancière and Chantal Mouffe. As described, according to Biesta, subjectification occupies a significant role compared to the others. Next, we will clarify the meaning of the concept of subjectification, and how Biesta discussed it.

According to Biesta, subjectification is related to ‘the ways in which students can be(come) subjects in their own right and not just remain objects of the desires and directions of others’ (Biesta 2017: 28). He argued that to exist as a subject means ‘being in a “state of dialogue” with what and who is other’ (Biesta 2017: 4). As we can see in this explanation, he discussed becoming a subject or subjectification mainly based on Levinas’s theory of the Other.

When subjectification is explained based on Levinas’s argument, the concept of ‘uniqueness’ might be important. While quoting Levinas’s arguments, Biesta explained that uniqueness is about doing ‘what nobody else can do in my place’ (Levinas 1989: 202). He also added that it ‘is not the question “What makes me unique?”’ but ‘the question “When does it matter that I am I?”’ (Biesta 2017: 12). These situations are ‘those where someone calls upon me in such a way that the call is addressed at me and no one else’. In other words, they are ‘situations where we encounter a responsibility’ (Biesta 2017: 12). Biesta also described a responsibility as ‘the essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity’ based on Levinas (Biesta 2017: 12).

As above, Biesta’s concept of subjectification always assumes the existence of the Other and requires a response to such Others. In that sense, subjectification can be considered in the relationship

between the self and the world that extends outside of the self.

The question here is whether it is possible to measure subjectification objectively in education. For instance, can we judge whether students become subjects by objective criteria? In the following section, this paper will consider the problems that could be included in measuring subjectification in an age of measurement, or EBE based on Biesta’s discussion.

Regarding the measurement of subjectification, Biesta argued that subjectification should not be captured from the outside perspective—‘a third-person perspective’ (Biesta 2017: 11)—because subjectification and becoming subjects are related to the responsibility that we encounter based on uniqueness, according to Levinas. Therefore, Biesta discussed that there are difficulties in providing an account of the existence of subjects, that is, ‘an account of each human subject in its uniqueness’ by one general theory (Biesta 2017: 11-12).

For these reasons, Biesta argued that subjectification should be described from ‘a first-person perspective’. In contrast to a third-person perspective, which provides a general account of being subjects, a first-person perspective refers to the situation in which responsibility arises in the dialogue with the Other, that is, situations where uniqueness matters (Biesta 2017: 11-13).

In this sense, based on Biesta’s argument, subjectification in education may appear as an area which cannot be necessarily evaluated or measured by an objective index from a third-person perspective. Based on the previous discussion, students may become subjects when they encounter

responsibility, and it might be difficult for a third-person to conceive when or how it occurs. Thus, according to Biesta, one of the problems which might be included in evaluating and measuring subjectification from an objective perspective can be derived. It is also thought that this problem is deeply related to EBE, which emphasises objective criteria and measurements. In other words, subjectification could be captured as the concept that indicates one of the flaws of EBE. As such, Biesta also refers to the limits of measurement culture in education (cf. Biesta 2010).

In this section, the problem of measuring subjectification has been examined after confirming the meaning of Biesta's concept of subjectification. However, how subjectification can be practical in education has not been clarified sufficiently. Therefore, the following section will examine this and Biesta's discussion of 'political subjectivity' and 'political agency'.

3. Political Subjectification and Citizenship Education: On the Possibility of Educating an "Ignorant Citizen"

Opposing EBE's view that citizenship is measurable, Biesta was concerned about education's over-emphasis on "socialization". He expressed the need to consider "subjectification" and an "ignorant citizen" as an existential image of the subjectified citizenry (Biesta 2010: 23).

What does this "ignorant citizen" mean and how can it be educated? To consider this, this paper will initially review the concept of political subjectification and the "ignorant citizen". The existential possibility of the "ignorant citizen" as an

educational goal that goes beyond the scope of traditional citizenship education will then be considered. Subsequently, the practicality of citizenship inherent in the "ignorant citizen" will be examined, by connecting the concept of "agency" that Biesta discussed in 2006 and 2007 to the theory of political subjectification. Furthermore, from this perspective, the impossibility of EBE in citizenship education will be clarified.

For Biesta, the condition of citizenship education is that it promotes educating students to be political agent, and does not merely reproduce predefined molds. This is what we call political subjectification (Biesta 2010: 24). Furthermore, the key to citizenship education for political subjectification, according to Biesta, is an education that gains freedom associated with publicness, as opposed to individualization in society. Moreover, Biesta seeks the democratisation of education as an eventual goal (Biesta 2011a).

Here, derived from the relationship between political subjectification and citizenship education, the "ignorant citizen" is to be conceived as a new citizen. Based on the claims of Chantal Mouffe and Jacques Rancière, the "ignorant citizen" was originally conceived as an idea that free human beings can exist in the political community beyond the existing political order and people's action within it (Biesta 2011b: 151).

The "ignorant citizen" exists exclusively in the process of togetherness through participation in undetermined political processes (Biesta 2011b). Here, it becomes clear that Biesta's citizenship education is based on the relationship between gaining freedom with publicness as a purpose and

revealing a desire for democracy through daily life practices with the others as a means. Accordingly, the “ignorant citizen” is depicted as an existence by which an extreme form of political freedom can be enjoyed. The clear figurative image of the “ignorant citizen” is now clear and the possibility being opposed to a “good citizen” can be recognised.

Biesta’s concepts of political subjectification and the ignorant citizen envisioning democracy and seeking to acquire “freedom” in relation to Others, is certainly close to the notion of “citizenship-as-practice” (Biesta & Lawy 2009). However, when re-evaluating this considering the relationship with the issue of “subject”, a particular question of what “political agency” (Biesta 2010) can mean arises. Originally, Biesta’s political subjectification meant being a “subject” as a form of “political agency”. Therefore, considering the common understanding of agency, substantial meaning of politically subjectified should include not only obtaining “desire for democracy”, but also assuming the practice of political acts. However, the concept of the “ignorant citizen” does not mention these points explicitly.

So where can we find clues to identify the possibility of practical political actions that the “ignorant citizen” should have? It is worth noting that Biesta once considered the problem of “subject” in education, not only from his argument of the political subjectification in citizenship education but also from his theory of agency (Biesta & Tedder 2006; Biesta & Tedder 2007). Biesta defined agency here as “the ability to exert control over and give direction to one’s life” (Biesta & Tedder 2007: 135). Further referring to Emirbayer and Mische (1998),

Biesta perceived agency as an ability that can only be achieved through temporary and relational engagement with the contexts-for-action, not as a capacity being able to do something with a certain skill (Biesta & Tedder 2007: 135). Based on Biesta’s “ecological understanding of agency”, we may conceive the practice of the political agency supposedly contained by the “ignorant citizen”? Such an agency as an ability to give direction to one’s life, as discussed in this section, is possibly implied in the “political agency” that Biesta defined as a political subject.

In this section, Biesta’s theory of citizenship education on how to be politically subjectified and educate the “ignorant citizen” embodying it was examined. Biesta’s argument that the “subject” in political education should be treated not only as a matter of subjectification meaning ‘how can one be a subject?’, but also as a matter of “agency” meaning ‘what can one do and act as a subject?’ was discussed. Associated with this, Biesta’s perspective for “the citizenship-as-practice” will make a striking contrast with perspectives for the “good citizen”. This may lead to demonstrating the certain impossibility of EBE. Conversely, a new shape and figure of citizenship education can emerge.

Conclusion

This paper considered what Biesta’s ‘subjectification’ is, and whether we can evaluate ‘subjectification’ or not. In section 1, it became clear that his argument sought to overcome the difficulties that postmodern-education had, from the concept of ‘subjectification’. Therefore, section 2 focused on the concept of ‘subjectification’. It became clear that

‘subjectification’ cannot be evaluated. section 3 explored how Biesta’s citizenship education can be practical, referring to his concept of political subjectification. Thus, it is possible to discover the educational significance of ‘subjectification’ in an age of measurement.

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