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## Educational Journal of Living Theories

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### **Review of Gert Biesta's book (2006) *Beyond Learning; Democratic Education for a Human Future.* Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.**

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My interest in Gert Biesta's ideas for the generation of living-educational-theories is because of his focus on unique individuals and their responsibility. This resonates with the idea I put forward (Whitehead, 1989) that individuals should take responsibility for generating and sharing their unique explanations of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which they lived, worked and researched.

For Biesta we come into the world as unique individuals through the ways in which we respond responsibly to what and who is other (p. ix). I like his point that whilst we have a well-developed language of learning we now need to develop a language of education. Differences between a language of learning and a language of education explain why I focus on explaining educational influences in learning, rather than just learning.

My own reason for focusing on educational influences in learning is that not all learning is educational. History is littered with examples of nations exerting a cultural influence in the learning of citizens in ways that deny the humanity of others. I was born in 1944 at the end of the Second World War, whilst human beings were being killed in gas chambers in a culture that had brought many citizens to see other human beings as sub-human, which highlights this point that not all learning is educational. I distinguish learning as educational in terms of values that carry hope for human flourishing. Hence, those who are generating living-educational-theories as explanations of educational influence in learning, hold ourselves to account for living as fully as we can the values that carry hope for human flourishing.

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Biesta's idea of coming into the world as unique, singular beings is consistent with the idea that each individual can generate their own unique living-educational-theory as an explanation of their educational influence in learning.

Biesta is also attracted to the ideas of Levinas on responsibility, which Levinas characterizes as an ethical relationship, a relationship of infinite responsibility for the other (see Levinas, 1989). I have some difficulty with this idea of a relationship of infinite responsibility for the other, as I tend to focus on a responsibility *towards* rather than *for* the other. Accepting a responsibility for the other could deny the recognition that the other is responsible for themselves. I can express my responsibility towards the other whilst respecting the responsibility that the other has for themselves in generating their own unique living-educational-theory.

I particularly like Biesta's way of understanding and approaching education that isn't based on a truth about the human being. It is one that doesn't claim to know what the humanity of the human being consists of. He doesn't think of education as the production of particular identities or subjectivities or the insertion of newcomers into an existing social order. Instead Biesta argues for an approach that focuses on the multiple ways in which human beings, as unique, singular individuals, come into the world.

One of the ways in which individuals can explain their own coming into the world in this way is by generating and sharing their living-educational-theories through EJOLTS. Biesta articulates a way to understand education that itself responds to the challenges we are faced with today, including the disappearance of a language of education in the age of learning (p. 118). I am suggesting that contributors to EJOLTS can resist the disappearance of a language of education in the age of learning. We can do this by including the languages of education and learning within the explanations of our educational influences in learning that constitute our living-educational-theories.

## Reference

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Levinas, E. (1989) Ethics as First Philosophy, in *The Levinas Reader*, (ed). Seán Hand. Oxford: Blackwell.