



STUDI E RICERCHE

Listen, Execute and Deliver. PISA's Assignment for Teachers

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Ascolta, esegui e consegna. Le istruzioni di PISA per gli insegnanti

Abstract

In this paper, I analyse the consequences that PISA (Programme for International Students Assessment) and the OECD's educational agenda have had on schooling, as well as the conception of teaching that the OECD nurtures. I shall make my point conceptually by analysing the OECD's public documents – publications, videos, webpages, and brochures – thus unravelling the OECD's educational gesture and its underlying ethical framework. Specifically, I argue that the OECD's explicit gesture of shaping the educational arena from above risks producing a picture of schooling in which both teachers and students merely have to listen to the OECD's educational discourse, executing the related dictates, thus delivering OECD's educational provision worldwide. In the final part of the paper, drawing from Heidegger and Arendt, I attempt to lay out a different way of conceiving educational relationships if freed from the OECD's educational order.

Keywords

PISA, OECD, teaching, Heidegger, Arendt

In questo contributo vengono esaminate le conseguenze che il test PISA e l'agenda educativa dell'OCSE hanno sul modo di fare scuola, e l'idea dell'insegnamento che l'OCSE contribuisce a diffondere. Il contributo è un'analisi concettuale e procede attraverso la disamina di documenti, pubblicazioni, video, pagine web dell'OCSE, rivelando così l'atteggiamento educativo dell'Organizzazione e il suo implicito etico. Più specificamente, viene argomentato come l'atteggiamento dell'OCSE di volere costruire un unico framework per il modo di educare e fare scuola nel mondo rischi di produrre una classe docente unicamente esecutrice dei suoi dettami. Nella parte finale del contributo, partendo dall'opera di Hannah Arendt e di Martin Heidegger, viene delineato un diverso modo di intendere l'educazione e l'insegnamento.

Parole chiave

PISA, OCSE, insegnare, Heidegger, Arendt

Introduction

In this paper, I analyse the consequences that PISA (Programme for International Students Assessment) and OECD's educational agenda have on schooling, and which is the conception of teaching that OECD feeds. I shall make my point conceptually, by analysing OECD's public documents – publications, videos, webpages, and brochures – thus unraveling OECD's educational gesture, and its underlying ethical framework. My attempt, then, is a theoretical one and its focus is, in a sense, narrow: I limit my analysis to OECD's own words about PISA, teaching, and education. Additionally, given that OECD's language is direct and clear one could well argue that OECD's documents do not need extensive analysis to be understood and interpreted; in a sense, they speak for themselves.

However, despite such limitations, it is my contention that such an attempt is required. This is so for, despite a huge number of publications about both the specific role played by OECD in educational arena, and PISA Programme, we lack a thorough understanding of OECD's overall ethical gesture and, moreover, of the consequences such a gesture may have over the very idea of schooling and teaching. If we wish to unravel the problematic mix of rhetorical seduction, scientific authority, and ethical disengagement put in place by the Organization, a close scrutiny of OECD's own words is due.

In what follows, then, I wish to argue that OECD does not conceal its goal of shaping educational arena from above, thus establishing both aims, and means of schooling and education. In a sense, OECD aims to saturate the time and space of schooling with its own totalizing politics. Such a gesture, in turn, feeds a picture of schooling in which both teachers and policy makers just have to listen to OECD's educational discourse, executing the related dictate, thus delivering OECD's educational provision worldwide – and “deliver” is indeed a recurrent term in OECD's documents about schooling and teaching (OECD, 2012b, p. 11; Gurría, 2016a). In this way OECD narrows down schooling to a mere reproductive process, one in which aims and means of education are predetermined. Students' ethical and imaginative engagement is severely impoverished, and little space remains to teachers and students to articulate their own discourse and way of framing living and knowledge.

In this way we run the risk of losing sight of newness and surprise in education: OECD seems to know in advance the whole students' living track, from school desk to workplace (OECD, 2016a; OECD, 2016b). In this way, the new is totally contained within the boundaries of OECD's forecasting – thus losing its meaning as new – and students' uniqueness is levelled down to an abstract image of what girls and boys may want, desire, strive for. In this way, schooling is reduced to a perpetual training activity aimed at strengthening students' position in life. Remarkably, OECD's narrative enacts what we may call the loss of gratuitousness: the time and space of schooling is totally occupied by a rewarding logic, one in which everything is valued and benchmarked in terms of profit/benefit for the subject being taught or even in explicit monetary terms – and providing the “best value for money” seems to be a major concern of OECD's authoritative members (OECD, 2012b; Gurría, 2016b). Such a logic instills in students the conviction that both in education and living we perpetually dwell in a market arena, one in which everything is, in a sense, for sale.

In my paper, I also attempt to furnish a different educational conception than that depicted by OECD. I shall make my point against the background of two notions: the Heideggerian understanding of projecting, and the Arendtian question of “startling unexpectedness” (Arendt, 1998/1958, pp. 177-178) expressed in *The Human Condition*. Drawing from these issues, I wish to give a hint of what educational relationships may be when freed from the ethical cage OECD puts in place. The paper is framed into three sections, respectively committed to analysing OECD's educational stance – section one – providing examples of how OECD's rhetoric works – section two – and developing an outlook of a different educational gesture – section three.

1. Ethical disengagement and the impoverishment of schooling in OECD's educational framework

Over the last couples of decades, extensive analysis has been provided about both role and influence OECD has in the international educational landscape. Such reflections have focused on a substantial amount of

features, such as the connection OECD has with neoliberal discourse (Rutkowski, 2007; Hogan, Sellar, Lingard, 2016), and OECD's totalizing gesture and colonialist stance (Grek, 2007; Gorur, 2011; Shahjahan, 2013; d'Agnese, 2017). Scholars have also analyzed PISA's efficacy – or, we should say, inefficacy – in maintaining its promises (Bonderup Dohn, 2007), and its alleged detachment and objectivity (Grek, 2009). Contributions have also unraveled the seduction tools such as PISA exerts (Biesta, 2015) and the problematic public-private bond OECD enhances in global “edu-business” (Cutler, 2008; Ball, 2009).

However, what remains to be analysed are the effects OECD's educational discourse may have on schooling and teaching according to OECD's own vision. Otherwise stated, rather than discussing OECD's methodological choices, the relationship PISA has with various assessment theories and methods, or what reception PISA may have in different countries, I believe may be fruitful listening to OECD's own words, for such words are the most helpful tool to comprehend OECD's educational stance and its consequences. Then, let me begin by quoting OECD at length. In an OECD's 2014 publication we read the following:

‘What is important for citizens to know and be able to do?’ That is the question that underlies the world's global metric for quality, equity and efficiency in school education known as [...] PISA. PISA assesses the extent to which 15-year-old students have acquired key knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in modern societies. [...] This approach reflects the fact that modern societies reward individuals not for what they know, but for what they can do with what they know. PISA results reveal what is possible in education by showing what students in the highest-performing and most rapidly improving education systems can do. The findings allow policy makers around the world to gauge the knowledge and skills of students in their own countries in comparison with those in other countries, set policy targets against measurable goals achieved by other education systems, and learn from policies and practices applied elsewhere [...] PISA is not only an accurate indicator of students' abilities to participate fully in society after compulsory school, but also a powerful tool that countries and economies can use to fine-tune their education policies (OECD, 2014a, pp. 3-4).

It is my argument that in passages like the one quoted above, behind a plain, optimistic and reassuring language, and an apparent detachment and objectivity, we find we find a huge, all-encompassing project, which aims to shape what, when and how is to be taught, what, when and how it is to be learned, what the aims and purposes of boys and girls worldwide should be, what diverse societies worldwide should look like, and even which desires and aspirations the new generations should nurture. Then, let us begin by examining the first two sentences. Here we learn that PISA is able to assess “what is important for citizens to know and be able to do”. This is true for “PISA assesses the extent to which 15-year-old students have acquired key knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in modern societies.” The concept is reinforced in the end of the passage, where we are told that “PISA is [...] an accurate indicator of students' abilities to participate fully in society after compulsory school”. Here, it is worth noting that knowing what the skills are that allow 15-year-old students to participate in modern societies, entails knowing what such a society is. Moreover: given OECD's commitment to “global metric” and a “globalized education” (Schleicher, 2016a), we may well affirm that “modern societies” in OECD's educational picture actually reduce to one society – I will return to this further. One society in which, in turn, we just need one set of skills – that assessed by PISA and provided by OECD's educational programs and politics.

The belief of providing an all-encompassing framework for education is reinforced in the remaining part of the passage, where we learn that “PISA results reveal what is possible in education”. That is, the open and unpredictable terrain of educational possibilities is fully captured by OECD's all-encompassing eye: not just actual societies, with all of its features, complexity, paradoxes, contradictions, differences are comprehended by PISA; even the future of such societies is known in advance by PISA. Even OECD's recent interest about “cultural diversity and tolerance” (OECD, 2016c) is just apparent, for PISA's logic, by providing a unique metric and set of skills to be learned worldwide neither engages critically and ethically with differences within society, nor recognizes or engages with students' individual differences and diversity. PISA, in fact, appears to be ignorant of what students – and teachers as well – may feel, know and even desire before they are required to enter OECD's logic. In this sense, what OECD enhances is a kind of individualism without individuals.

Then, given such a wide and deep power to fully capture both the present and the future of education

and societies, we could ask what the role of teachers, educators and policy makers is in OECD's vision. Such a question is required for, consistently to OECD's words, such a role cannot lie in envisioning, imagining such a future, which is predicted by OECD. Here, I would highlight that we are not facing an occasional passage. In several places OECD and its authoritative members carefully emphasise the power PISA has of being "a mirror" of education "demonstrating to all countries what is possible" (Gurrià, 2016a). Moreover: in Gurrià authoritative words, "PISA tests the readiness for an active role in today's high-tech society; it tests how they think and how they work... But first of all PISA shows what achievements are possible in education" (Gurrià, 2016b). Then, OECD words lead us to believe the – paradoxical – affirmation that the present and the future of education are envisioned by a two-hour test.

And indeed, the role policy makers should have in OECD's vision is clearly explicated by the Organization: "[PISA's] findings allow policy makers around the world to gauge the knowledge and skills of students in their own countries in comparison with those in other countries, set policy targets against measurable goals achieved by other education systems, and learn from policies and practices applied elsewhere". That is, policy makers – just – have to look at PISA results, thus fine-tuning educational policies against OECD's data. PISA is, in fact, "a powerful tool that countries and economies can use to fine-tune their education policies" (OECD, 2014a, p. 4).

The problems with such an understanding are not just that data, as we all know, are anything but innocent. The very problem is that there is a great difference between data about educational systems, on the one hand, and the measurable – and not measurable – goals such systems aim to achieve. This is so for the former entity – namely, data – refers to *the attempt* to capture what one has already made, while the latter – the goals – refers to what one aims to achieve in the future. Otherwise stated, OECD implicitly equates the educational status quo as it is measured by PISA and the general aims and purposes of education as a society may wish to realize.

In this way, OECD fails to recognize teachers', policy makers', students' and even people's capacity to autonomously set which goals to pursue, measurable and not measurable, too, thus reducing schooling to a perpetual training activity. OECD, otherwise stated, displays a conception in which "the register of possible human action is already fixed" (Vlieghe, 2011, p. 191). This, of course, is not to say that any and every teacher or policy maker should have the power to establish her own aims and goals detached from national curriculum, school's guidelines, and social context or that international assessment tools should not have a place in educational research. Rather, this is to say that establishing the aims and goals of schooling and education is something which pertains to ongoing democratic discussion, one involving experts, researchers teachers, policy makers, students and civil society at large (Biesta, 2004). Otherwise stated, international assessment tools such as PISA are just one option within manifold possibilities.

Related to this is the fact that along with "data" and "measurable goals" OECD furnishes a whole ideology of learning, being ideology that set of ethical and theoretical assumptions which necessarily ground methods and means – and, in turn, data. Otherwise stated, a whole educational framework is implicitly delivered along with OECD analysis. Drawing from Masschelein critique of learning regime, we may say that through PISA OECD "increasingly expresses the way in which we 'read' our experiences, relationships and attitudes. It increasingly determines the way in which we understand and organize ourselves" (Masschelein, 2001b, p. 2).

And such an understanding and organization passes through what we may call a kind of rewarding logic. As OECD states, "modern societies reward individuals not for what they know, but for what they can do with what they know" (OECD, 2014a, pp. 3-4). Here, I wish to highlight that the aim of schooling is not just that of furnishing students with such rewarding skills. The aim of schooling should also be that of furnishing a time and space where a discussion about aims and means of society is possible. Again, my concern is not so much with the rewarding logic in itself; my concern is that of taking one logic as *the* logic.

That is why PISA works as a kind of ongoing subtraction of responsibility and capacity for decisions from teachers and policy makers. OECD, in fact, appears ignorant of the fact that teachers' and educationalists' work consists above all in engaging with societies, cultures, and diverse forms of living, and, against such a manifold world, imagine and identify viable paths putting them in ongoing democratic discussion. Such a lack of acknowledgment comes to undermine one of the pillars of both schooling and society, namely, democratic engagement with the projection of the future.

2. "What is there left for me to do?" Teaching as delivering

Thus far, I have attempted to analyse OECD's picture of education as related to society. In this section, I attempt to provide some instances of how OECD's rhetoric works to empty teachers' role and teachers-students relationships, putting both under the aegis of the Organization. I begin by analysing PISA-based Test for School.

PISA-based Test for School test was piloted in 2012 in the USA, Canada, and the UK on a voluntary basis, funded by the OECD, local school districts, and a number of US-based organizations (Rutkowski, 2015). Such a tool was designed "to meet the demand, from teachers and school leaders, for a tool that provides internationally comparable performance results as well as tangible insights on how to leverage improvements" (OECD, 2016b).

As for PISA, OECD is keen to provide a lot of indications about the importance and the relevance of such a test. Particularly, what is striking is the largeness of issues assessed by PISA-based Test for School, and the variety of indications emerging from it according to OECD's opinion. According to OECD's own words, in fact, "similar to the international PISA assessment, the OECD Test for Schools measures 15-year-old students' applied knowledge and competencies in reading, mathematics and science as well as their attitudes to learning and school" (OECD, 2012a, p. 3). In OECD's reports and recommendations related to this tool teachers may find "examples of strategies, policies and practices from education systems around the world to support critical reflection and encourage school staff and local educators to look beyond their classrooms in search of national and global excellence" (OECD, 2012a, p. 3). OECD's Test for Schools, however, also has wider aims. Its performing nature does not limit to competencies in reading, mathematics, and science. In line with PISA test, it allows teachers to know whether students are able to communicate, reason, and to be successful:

Are 15-year-old students at your school prepared to meet the challenges of the future? Can they analyse, reason and communicate their ideas effectively? Have they developed the knowledge and skills that are essential for their successful participation in societies of the 21st century? The OECD Test for Schools seeks to answer these questions through a student assessment that is directly linked to the knowledge base of the internationally recognised Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (OECD, 2012a, p. 22).

If we take for granted OECD's words, that is, if we believe that OECD test for schools maintains its promises, which is the role deserved to teachers doing their work and what happens to students' capacity to responsibly choose? Simply put, how we have to understand schooling, teaching and learning based on OECD Test for Schools? The question, so I hope, is anything but trivial, for such a test comes to substitute both teachers' and students' agency with OECD's measurement, purposes, and indications, thus defusing schooling and teaching projective dimension. Then, by such a severe reduction of capacity to decide and choose, ethical and imaginative engagement in acting and thinking come to be reduced as well. We should note, in fact, that OECD Test for Schools can measure "15-year-old students' applied knowledge and competencies in reading, mathematics and science", that is, more than seventy percent of the curriculum and its applications. It may also provide effective knowledge about students' "attitudes to learning and school", that is, knowledge about that complex and fragile work that caring teachers put in place throughout the year, through ongoing dialogue and evaluations of students' ways of behaving. Such attitudes, I wish to highlight, come to be revealed in diverse ways, some manifest, some hidden. A student may suddenly change her or his attitude toward schooling, knowledge and peers as well, and attentive teachers have to carefully read hidden signs of such changes, which, more often than not, show themselves by means of indirect clues. Moreover: something as delicate as important as students' attitude toward schooling hardly can be assessed once and for all. Rather, it is a matter of ongoing work of empathy, dialogic interaction, and interpretation. Such a work, additionally, does not guarantee its own success, in that it seeks to interpret what, to some extent, is invisible (English 2016).

However, OECD Test for Schools, according to OECD's words, goes far beyond. Such a test, in fact, may assess whether "students [are] prepared to meet the challenges of the future", whether they can "analyse, reason and communicate their ideas effectively" and whether they are able to develop "the knowl-

edge and skills that are essential for their successful participation in societies of the 21st century". Given such a largeness of functions, one may reasonably ask which role remains for teachers. I think it is clear enough that the role for teachers – and policy makers as well – OECD has in mind is that of mere providers of the learning order disposed by OECD. When teachers are superseded in their work of designing and envisioning purposes and values of teaching practices, a good part of their role comes to be erased, and they are just agents of a preconceived learning package. Students, as a consequence, lose their role as well, for they have to just learn and apply what they are being taught, according to OECD's indications. OECD's model, in fact, does not incite students to seek ideas that challenge their own. Students, following Freire's critique of "banking education", have no possibility to say their critical discourse, or cultivating their aims, ambitions and desires. In this way OECD narrows down students' capacity for autonomously projecting and desiring. Even the courage to pursue one's own goals is ossified by OECD's educational logic. OECD seems to forget that learning is just a part – although an important part – of education, which is the overall framework in which learning takes place (Baldacci, 2007, pp. 53-54). Moreover: both students' and teachers' attitude to concretely recognize plurality and differences is erased beforehand by PISA's mould.

Then, we may note that the picture of schooling emerging from this brief overview is one involving a secondary – if not residual – role for teachers, who must always refer their action to OECD's results and narrative, which provides aims, goals, and means of schooling and education. That is why OECD's model for schooling ends in producing ethical disengagement in whoever has a stake in education. Being ethically involved, in fact, entails being concerned with aims and goals of education. When discourse about educational ends is all resolved in advance, we are within what may well be called an authoritarian model of teaching, authoritarianism being understood as any and every way of educating in which educational goals and overall vision of living is pre-established.

For authoritarian teaching to be enacted you do not necessarily need students repeating sentences and ideas over and over again. For authoritarian teaching to be enacted it is sufficient to cut the cord which binds values, aims and purposes to the concrete practice of education. When aims, values and purposes are conceived and enacted from above, by institutions or people that give them for granted without further discussion and without the necessary degree of uncertainty, authoritarian teaching is put in place.

Moreover, despite the OECD's emphasis on equity and equality, OECD powerfully suggests a sharp division in education, that is, the division between who is able to set the stage, as it were, thus assigning roles and defining the overall script, and who is able to only perform and enact such a script. Here, I do not wish to deny the different educational responsibility of individuals involved in educational processes and practices, thus praising for an erroneous and inconsistent model of teaching in which 'everything goes', nor do I want to underestimate that education also requires that different individuals and professionals – e.g., policy makers, teachers, and, of course, students – play different roles. Rather, my concern regards OECD's twofold role, as both the institution evaluating educational effectiveness worldwide, and the institution setting educational aims and purposes. In this sense, OECD places itself both at the beginning, and at the end of the educational process: OECD sets the goals of education, the means by which such goals have to be pursued and, finally, measures who has made a good job and who has not.

This gesture is clear in statement such as those we find in the webpage devoted to explaining aims and structure of the PISA-based Test for Schools, where OECD states that "It is expected that the PISA-Based Test for Schools will provide [...] the opportunity [...] to improve learning and build better skills for better lives." And "In addition to assessing students' ability to apply the knowledge they have acquired, the PISA-based Test for Schools also benchmarks how students [...] are prepared to become members of an increasingly global society" (OECD, 2016b).

When reading these two statements we find two problems, which, in a sense, weaken the pillars of any sound and consistent approach to education, namely, scientific consistency and democratic gesture. A problem with scientific consistency is entailed in the former statement. Here, we learn that OECD builds "better skills for better lives". Such a statement is not an isolated case. In several places OECD affirms to be able to identify which the way for a "better life" is. We find such a gesture in a OECD's 2012 publication with the meaningful title *Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives*. We find it, again, in a 2014 publication, where OECD speaks about "convert[ing] better jobs into better lives" (OECD, 2014, p. 3). We find it,

moreover, in the claim stating OECD's own mission, namely, "developing better policies for better life" (OECD, 2016b). And in a 2016 video, Andreas Schleicher – OECD's Director for Education and Skills – seems to go even further when stating that "we have laid the foundations for better policies and better lives" (OECD, 2016). The problem with such a language is that it seems more in line with advertisement language than with scientific commitment. The whole string, which should conduct from "better skills" to a "better life" is unfounded. Particularly, the last passage – that converting better jobs into better lives – is a leap between incommensurable entities. Of course, one could argue that Schleicher, in that video, did not present a scientific report and that a good dose of advertisement is not a pity when presenting one's own product. However, I argue that this is not the case, for scientific role and authority and advertisement fascination are not separate strategy in OECD's gesture. Rather, OECD seems to benefit from the union of these two features, which generate a mix of rhetorical fascination and scientific authority difficult to debunk. After all, who could be against the goal of conducting students to "better lives"?

Such a twofold gesture made up of scientific authority and advertisement fascination is highly problematic, in that, when listening to an advertisement, one is aware that languages and images are intended and prepared in order to capture listeners' attention, thus persuading people to buy the product advertised rather than the concurrent one; features and benefits of products are, then, intentionally overestimated. The question is that people are well aware about the amount of pretense contained in advertisement and, in turn, such a pretense, due to the nature of the message and people's awareness, does not work as a deceit; rather, it is an explicit rule of the commercial game. However, this is not the case when listening to institutions claiming scientific authority – as in the case of OECD. When playing the game of research, as it were, we have to abide by quite a different rule. Here, one would expect a kind of inclusive approach, and the possibility to fairly take into account different and even opposite opinions, gestures and options. So, OECD, through such a twofold gesture and language, one that speaks at the very same time and with respect to the same contents through scientific publications and brochures, books and videos, enacts a politic that is, in my opinion, ambiguous. If one would stress the question, one could say that OECD misuses its reputation as a scientific authority, thus making claims that hardly may be found in a scientific publication, but that, due to their captivating nature, aim to convince people about the goodness of its own products – PISA, in this case.

While this question comes to undermine the scientific pillar upon which OECD grounds its authority, we find, as stated above, also a problem with a democratic view education. Such a problem emerges when reading claims such as "PISA-based Test for Schools also benchmarks how students... are prepared to become members of an increasingly global society". Such a statement is double problematic for, on the one hand, being a member of a society is not something which could and should be benchmarked; on the other hand, a democratic society should include its members regardless their skills and knowledge. Otherwise stated, inclusion, in a democratic vision, should *precede* skills and competencies, not being grounded on them. We see that the purpose of enhancing, creating, making room for opposition or critique to society as it stands is wholly outside OECD's view. In perpetuating the educational status quo OECD comes to full circle: it defuses the potential of the new, narrows down teachers' and students' agency, and, importantly, renders difficult even to conceive of an alternative to its own model. Nonetheless, if we believe that schooling is not just about training and reproduction, such an alternative space is required – a purpose I undertake in the following section.

3. Making room for projecting, caring for students' "startling unexpectedness"

In this section, drawing from Arendt and Heidegger, I attempt to hint at a different educational gesture than that emerging from OECD's narrative. First to begin, let me make a brief remark about my choice to discuss such a gesture through the lens of Heidegger's and Arendt's philosophy. Although many authors could be used to challenge OECD's learning agenda¹, I believe that a reading based on Heidegger and

1 See, for instance, Ball and Olmedo, who use a Foucauldian framework to highlight risks and failures of such an agenda (Ball and Olmedo, 2013), or Subedi's (2013) and Shahjahan's (2013) reference to the decolonial perspective as essential for understanding the neoliberal curriculum and agenda.

Arendt may unfold educational features and phenomena that would remain concealed when framed in terms of effectiveness and learning outcomes. Specifically, I am referring to students' autonomous capacity for projecting, on the one hand, and the importance for women and men of "taking initiative" (Arendt, 1998/1958, p. 177), thus disclosing one's own being. Such themes, far from being just 'philosophical concerns', are the very heart of educating and teaching (Mortari, 2009; Orlando Cian, 1989), since without initiative and projecting there is no education at all. Then, let me begin with Heideggerian analysis of projecting.

The issue of projecting is one of the leit-motif of one of Heidegger's most productive periods, namely, the late 1920s. Specifically, Heidegger speaks of this issue in *Being and Time* (1996/1927), *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* (1992/1928), and *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. (1992/1929-1930). Through these works, we learn that "the essence of man, the Dasein in him, is determined by this projective character" (Heidegger, 1992/1929-1930, p. 362) and that "Project belongs to the constitution of being of Da-sein" (ibid., p. 203). Project, then, "is the existential constitution of being in the realm of factual potentiality of being. And, as thrown, Dasein is thrown into the mode of being of projecting [...] Dasein [...] is, as long as it is, projecting." (Heidegger, 1996/1927, p. 136) and is "thrown project" (Heidegger, 1992/1929-1930, p. 205) from its very beginning. Moreover: "Only from the height of this high projection does [Dasein] glimpse its true depths" (Heidegger, 1992/1928, p. 17).

These passages powerfully convey that women and men are projecting beings all the way down. In Heideggerian understanding, it is not that Dasein exists and, then, occasionally, projects itself. Existing means projecting, and existence itself, as being-by and being-with, stands on projecting. Importantly, Dasein, as projecting, "is its possibilities as possibilities." (Heidegger, 1996/1927, p. 136) Moreover: understanding one's projecting – and one's possibilities as well – as something we have, namely, something we should master, is misleading, for we always-already dwell and, in a sense, are our projecting and possibilities. Being projecting and making projections are in fact very different things, for the former locution refers to an existential condition, something we are thrown into, while the latter emphasises a supposed power of the subject of mastering its existential conditions. The problem with such an understanding is that thinking of possibilities and projecting as something at our disposal fails to acknowledge that the condition of projecting always dominates woman and men, whatever they think or makes. This is not to say that we are at the mercy of any possibility we are thrown into. Rather, this is to say that human beings cannot escape from the very condition of being projecting beings. In Agambenian language, we are creature of possibilities, rather than creatures of necessity (Vlieghe, 2011; Lewis, 2013).

Educationally, such an understanding conveys an ethics of humility and openness, one in which teachers take care of students' becoming and being possible, helping them in exploring the open – and, to some extent, unknown and unknowable – terrain of their own possibilities. This is so for, in Heideggerian understanding, Dasein "does not thematically grasp that upon which it projects, the possibilities themselves". Possibility, then, is something transcending Dasein. Such a transcending character of possibility allows a conception of education as something that always-already transcends both teachers and students: whatever the subject being taught, whatever the activity put in place, there is always much more to education than we may capture at a given time.

And a clear sense of openness – one we rarely find in Heideggerian work – pervades a passage we find in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. Here we are told that,

Every projection raises us away into the possible, and in so doing brings us back into the expanded breadth of whatever has been made possible by it [...] This expansion that raises us away and binds us [...] also shows, however, its intrinsic character of opening. Yet [...] it is not some mere or fixed remaining open for something: neither for what is possible, nor even for what is actual. [...] The object of the projection is neither the possibility nor the actuality - the projection has no object at all, but is an opening for making-possible. In making-possible the originary relatedness of the possible and the actual, of possibility and actuality in general and as such, is revealed [...] For this reason it is, as we may say in borrowing a word from Schelling, the look into the light of a possible making-possible [...] The projection raises us away into and thus unveils the dimension of the possible in general (Heidegger, 1992/1929-1930, p. 364).

This passage strikes me as highly significant to education by both indicating the necessity of actualizing the possibilities that are generated by projecting and considering the open territory in which this actualizing appears. In fact, we observe that the expansion that is generated by projecting has a twofold function: it “binds us” and carries us away “into the expanded breadth of whatever has been made possible by it”. That is, the projection is, on the one hand, a production of bindings by which we concretely engage with the environment, thus allowing for the actualization of possibilities; on the other hand, this production does not erase its own source, and the “expanded breadth” of the possible always remains open for new bindings.

Educationally, it is not that teachers and educators should not define and establish boundaries and concrete objectives in educational practices, which would transform educational settings into “a free-floating potentiality of being in the sense of the ‘liberty of indifference’” (Heidegger, 1996/1927, p. 135). Rather, in establishing contents and frameworks of educational settings and situations, educationalists must also continually consider the open space where these concrete and necessary boundaries appear, namely, the “possible making-possible [...] the dimension of the possible in general” (Heidegger 1992/1929-1930, 364).

The “expanded breadth” of pure possibility and the attunement of Heideggerian words echoes in Arendtian call for the “character of startling unexpectedness... inherent in all beginnings and in all origins” (Arendt, 1998/1958, p. 178). Several scholars have highlighted the educational relevance and bearings of Arendtian notion of action and speech, and Arendtian questions of “beginning” and “beginners” are, in a sense, classical issues of educational philosophy and theory (Biesta, 2001; Levinson, 2001). Here, I wish to linger on some underestimated nuances of Arendtian insights, contrasting them to PISA’s model. Arendt’s discussion of such a “startling unexpectedness” takes place in Chapter V of *The Human Condition*, in the section titled *The Disclosure of the Agent in Speech and Action*. Here we are told that the meaning of action is to be found in “tak[ing] initiative, setting “something into motion”. Such taking initiative renders human beings a “beginning” and “beginners”. This beginning, Arendt writes, “is not the same as the beginning of the world; it is not the beginning of something but of somebody, who is a beginner himself”. As I understand Arendt’s point, it is not that we may or may not “take initiative”. Taking initiative is necessary in order to be “somebody”. Taking initiative is, in a sense, human beings’s *principium individuationis* and, reversely, human beings are the condition for beginning – and, importantly, for freedom - to exist: “With the creation of man, the principle of beginning came into the world itself, which, of course, is only another way of saying that the principle of freedom was created when man was created but not before” (Arendt, 1998/1958, p. 177).

Interestingly, the subsequent passage strictly connects both freedom and “the principle of beginning” to the “character of startling unexpectedness” we find “in all beginnings and in all origins” (Arendt, 1998/1958, p. 177). As Arendt states, “It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before. This character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings and in all origins” (Arendt, 1998/1958, pp. 177-178). And, as we read further, “The new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which for all practical, everyday purposes amounts to certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle” (Arendt, 1998/1958, pp. 177-178). By framing the new and the beginning as the condition of being human, and, in turn, by disclosing such newness and beginning in guise of a “miracle”, one which happens against all odds, Arendt powerfully conveys the very fragility of human nature. Being human relies upon something which happens “against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws”. Nonetheless, being human is something which happens everytime a human being is “prompted to action”, everytime woman and men take initiative in speech and action. Now, it is my contention that preserve, nurture such a fragility, creating occasions for such a “startling unexpectedness” to grow up, is what is at stake in teachers’ everyday work in classrooms.

This is not to deny teachers’ and students’ everyday engagement with curriculum, abilities and knowledge. Quite the opposite: this is to say that when detached from the “character of startling unexpectedness” which any student brings with herself, curriculum, knowledge and diverse abilities are dead things. And it is enough clear that PISA’s model not just denies the “miracle” of freedom and, thus, of the new. PISA’s model also works to confirm “the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability”, thus erasing,

in Heideggerian language, the “possible making-possible... the dimension of the possible in general” (Heidegger, 1992/1929-1930, pp. 364). Following Masschelein critique of learning society, we may say that OECD fulfils “a situation in which education seems to be conflated with facilitating (individual) learning processes and schools are being transforming from public institutions into privatized learning environments” (Masschelein, 2001, pp. 530). OECD, as a major actor within such a process of transformation, acts over schooling as a worldwide mould, containing and resolving such a dimension in its neo-liberal narrative, disempowering teachers and stifling students’ projecting.

And it is exactly such a dimension of the pure possibility, of “the possible in general” that teachers, in order to preserve the very possibility for freedom to occur, should nurture in their everyday engagement. Learning, then, in its broadest meaning, should also be a call towards the possibility to think, act and be otherwise in the first place, and students should also learn that whoever they are, whatever they are living through, another order of possibilities may be thought of.

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