



Book Review

The beautiful risk of education by Gert Biesta

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The Beautiful Risk of Education is primarily a philosophy of education text, yet, while dealing with philosophical ideas from Genesis to late 20th century continental philosophy, Biesta has written a book that is approachable and eminently practical in its scope.

The book begins by posing questions on the story of the creation and ways in which we may interpret aspects of Genesis according to different readings. Biesta starts to unravel ways of seeing the world that can inform how we might start to regard the 'subject' and, in turn, the child and subjectivity. This becomes a basis for his later thesis on creativity and education as risk rather than a pre-fixed product driven encounter.

In the succeeding chapter, Biesta develops communication, with reference to the philosophical writing of John Dewey (1859 -1952), an important figure in US philosophy of education. In relation to communication, teachers as participants in learning is explained, in the context of the 'good' of society as a whole. For early childhood teachers, this harks back to the socio-cultural enterprise, though it is interesting to read Biesta's account, coming from a philosophy of education standpoint.

Having looked at communication, teaching is considered, where the teacher is put very much back into the forefront of the action. After the experience of constructivism, where the teacher becomes mute in the face of what the child is doing, teaching for Biesta engages both child and teacher in 'risk'. Hence, unpredictability for both child and teacher is facilitated through the educative act. This brings into contention spontaneous knowing, as well as the permission for the teacher to interrupt proceedings to provoke engagement.

A chapter on emancipation is followed by a chapter headed 'democracy'. This is territory that has been developed by Biesta through successive publications and a theme that is here explained in clear terms relating to a child's engagement with others. Again, early childhood educators know this concept all too well in 'turn taking' and forming 'respect' for others, a vital aspect for any functioning community. What Biesta provides in this chapter is an interesting reading of Hannah Arendt's (1906–1975) work, opening up questions of how we recognise and embrace difference in education.

A beautiful conclusion is reached as Biesta considers 'virtuosity'. This interesting ending to the book looks at the Greek concept of *phronesis*, or expert knowledge gained in doing, becoming intuitive or intuitive knowledge. Biesta sees virtuosity as the basis for quality in teaching. While this is commonplace to many, to revisit and learn the philosophical derivation of such knowing is a fascinating journey.

Although this publication can be challenging, it is written in a very down to earth and accessible style. For a teacher wanting to test out their knowledge or engage in ways to re-think practice, this book offers new possibilities, while at the same time being thoroughly grounded in current philosophical thinking.

References

Biesta, G. (2013). *The beautiful risk of education*. London, UK: Paradigm