

**persons, subjectivity, language and the world: an “analytic” alternative to gert biesta’s: “touching the soul: education, philosophy and children in an age of instrumentalism”**

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abstract

In this paper, I first summarize what I take to be the main points of Biesta’s presentation, and proceed to offer some criticisms from the perspective of analytic philosophy. I propose an alternative framework for viewing the self as subject in the world which is both more transparent and conceptually more intuitive than the one proposed by Biesta. Among other advantages, this framework accounts for the central place of dialogue and communal inquiry, both key components of Philosophy for Children. Biesta’s focus is the child as subject who is in the world from the beginning, so to speak, rather than as subject who constructs that world. Rightly critical of much contemporary jargon surrounding education – including its obsession with measurable learning outcomes – Biesta’s skepticism about constructivism leads him to question the emphasis on thinking that has been part of Philosophy for Children from its formation. I question his claim that this emphasis pays too much attention to “the head” at the expense of “heart” and “soul”. I suggest that Biesta has constructed a “straw-person” in his criticisms of p4c, by proposing, for example, that instead of teaching children to ask questions, it is the teacher’s task to assist children to see themselves as being in question. I acknowledge his depiction of good teaching as a process of interrupting children’s subjective pursuit of their desires – whereby they make the transition to what is desirable, but suggest, first, that the idea of interruption can also be understood as a process of making things unsettled for children and, secondly, that in his determination to find the “middle ground” between allowing persons as subjects to “annihilate” the world, and allowing the world to annihilate them, he fails to articulate a clear conception of self-awareness. I cite the work of the analytic philosopher Donald Davidson who provides a triangular view of self-awareness as being mutually dependent upon both each person’s awareness of others (i.e. other persons) and our shared awareness of the world.

keywords: persons-in-the-world; self-awareness; conceptual analysis.

**um comentário “analítico” sobre a apresentação de gert biesta: “tocando a alma: educação, filosofia e crianças em um era de instrumentalização”**

resumo

Neste artigo, primeiramente sumário quais considero serem os pontos principais da apresentação de Biesta e, partindo deles, ofereço algumas críticas a partir da perspectiva da filosofia analítica. Proponho uma estrutura alternativa para encarar o *self* como um sujeito no mundo, que é não somente mais transparente, como também conceitualmente mais intuitivo do que aquele proposto por Biesta. Entre outras vantagens, esta estrutura dá conta do lugar central do diálogo e da comunidade de investigação, ambos componentes-chave da Filosofia para Crianças. O foco de Biesta é a criança como sujeito que está no mundo desde o princípio, por assim dizer, em vez de um sujeito que constrói este mundo. Corretamente crítico de grande parte do jargão contemporâneo envolvendo a educação –

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incluindo sua obsessão com resultados mesuráveis de aprendizado – , o ceticismo de Biesta sobre o construtivismo o leva a questionar a ênfase no pensamento, que caracteriza a Filosofia para Crianças desde a sua formação. Eu questiono a sua afirmação de que esta ênfase dirige muita atenção à “cabeça”, em detrimento do “coração” e da “alma”. Sugiro que Biesta construiu um “espantalho” com suas críticas à Filosofia para Crianças quando propõe, por exemplo, que em vez de ensinar crianças a fazer perguntas, é função do professor ajudá-las a verem a si mesmas como estando em questão. Reconheço sua representação do “bem ensinar” como um processo de interrupção da busca subjetiva da criança por seus desejos – através do qual elas fazem a transição ao que seja desejável, mas sugiro, primeiro, que a ideia de interrupção também pode ser entendida como um processo de tornar as coisas instáveis para as crianças e, segundo, que em sua determinação em encontrar um terreno comum entre permitir pessoas, enquanto sujeitos a aniquilarem o mundo, e permitir ao mundo aniquilá-las, ele falha em articular uma concepção clara de autoconsciência. Cito o trabalho do filósofo analítico Donald Davidson, que fornece uma visão triangular da autoconsciência como sendo mutualmente dependente tanto da consciência de cada pessoa dos outros (i.e. das outras pessoas) quanto de nossa consciência compartilhada do mundo.

palavras-chave: pessoas-no-mundo; autoconsciência; análise conceitual.

**un comentario analítico sobre la presentación de gert biesta: “tocando el alma: educación, filosofía y niños en una época de instrumentalización”.**

resumen

En este artículo, en primer lugar, realizo un sumario de los puntos más importantes de la exposición de Biesta y, a partir de ellos, ofrezco algunas críticas desde la perspectiva de la filosofía analítica. Propongo una estructura alternativa para encarar el *self* como un sujeto en el mundo, que es no solo más transparente, sino más intuitiva de aquella propuesta por Biesta. Entre otras ventajas esta estructura da cuenta del lugar central del diálogo en la comunidad de indagación, dos componentes centrales en el programa de filosofía para niños. El foco de Biesta es el niño como sujeto que está en el mundo desde el principio, por así decir, en vez de un sujeto que construye el mundo. Correctamente crítico de gran parte de la jerga contemporánea, sobre educación – incluyendo su obsesión con resultados mensurables en el aprendizaje- el escepticismo de Biesta respecto del constructivismo lo lleva a cuestionar el énfasis sobre el pensamiento, que caracteriza a la Filosofía con Niños desde su creación. Cuestiono su afirmación relativa a que se prioriza la cabeza en detrimento del corazón y el alma. Sugiero que Biesta construyó un espantapájaros con sus críticas a la Filosofía para Niños, cuando propone, por ejemplo, que en vez de enseñar a los niños a realizar preguntas, es función del maestro ayudarlos a que puedan verse como seres en cuestión. Reconozco su representación del “buen enseñar” como un proceso de interrupción de la búsqueda subjetiva del niño y sus deseos – a través de lo cual el niño hace la transición a lo deseable, pero sugiero, primero, que la idea de interrupción también puede ser entendida como un proceso de tornar inestables las cosas para los niños, y, en segundo lugar, que en su determinación de encontrar un terreno común entre permitir personas, en cuanto sujetos que aniquilen el mundo y permitir al mundo aniquilarlas, falla en articular una noción clara de autoconciencia. Cito el trabajo del filósofo analítico Donald Davidson que ofrece una visión triangular de la autoconciencia como siendo mutuamente dependiente tanto de la conciencia de cada persona (i.e. de las otras personas) como de nuestra conciencia compartida del mundo.

palabras clave: personas-en-el-mundo; autoconciencia; análisis conceptual.

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*persons as subjects in the world*

Biesta begins his presentation with a comment about the prominence of *thinking* in Philosophy for Children (“P4C”). He is concerned that a one-sided focus on thinking – even those normative aspects of thinking with which philosophy has traditionally been concerned, as enshrined in logic, reasoning and conceptual analysis – is likely to favor a “constructivist” or “subjectivist” view of the child which puts thinking and the self first and foremost, rather than a more balanced view whereby the child is seen as already being *in* the world. Biesta’s key questions include: “What does living in the world imply about persons as subjects?”, and “How can education contribute to the task of *living well* in the world?” In addressing these questions, he offers a normative perspective on education as *interrupting* or *interrogating* children’s experiences and attitudes, whereby they come to see themselves as *subjects* in the world who are, however, not at the *center* of the (their own) world.

Critics of constructivist theories of learning are rightly wary of the idea that each of us imposes our own subjectivity on, and thereby constructs, his or her own reality. Apart from a strong suspicion of relativism, this idea begs the question of how the subject can have any view of her/himself as being – and seeing himself as being – in the world. But we need also to avoid the opposing extreme that construes individuals – especially the young – as mere *objects*, i.e. as lacking any genuine agency with respect to their own life journeys. It is to Biesta’s credit that he perceives the need to steer a path between these extremes.

For Biesta, the child as subject in the world cannot be adequately construed as merely a *learner* of that world. In contrast to an object that may be described as an “adaptive learning system” – he gives the example of a hi-tech vacuum cleaner that “learns” from its mistakes as it adapts to its environment – the child is *not* an object (or not *just* an object) but a *subject*, in particular, a subject that can communicate, and with whom we can communicate (through speaking and

listening or their equivalents, first and foremost). Further, in the world of the vacuum cleaner, other objects which it encounters (tables and chairs, etc.) are mere *obstacles* to be overcome mechanically or instrumentally (by learning to move around them). In contrast with the world of the child, this world lacks certain crucial features, viz. a *teacher* with whom the child is in direct communication, and a *normative* dimension which allows for *judgements* of right/wrong, correct/incorrect and /desirable/undesirable.

Building on his reading of Immanuel Levinas, Biesta construes persons as subjects whose experiences in and of the world enable them to develop a normative or ethical sense of their place in that world. This ethical sense also emerges from questions, such as “What is this (person, plant, school) asking of me?” In more affective terms, the world and its objects are, indeed, first encountered as *obstacles* which are resistant to our own subjective desires; crudely put, they (often) stop us from getting what we want. In the face of such resistance, we have several options: we can proceed, headlong, to counter resistance by crushing or ignoring it; we can allow these obstacles to overwhelm us to the point where we virtually *withdraw from* the world (as can happen to those who see themselves as helpless victims); *or* we can strive to find – and help others to find – the *middle ground* wherein what we desire is transformed into a sense of what is *desirable*. For Biesta, this normative transformation might be termed “education”, whereby the school – led by teachers – is the environment in which students’ desires, like their egos, are put into perspective. In terms which I prefer, each of us develops a sense of her/himself as *one among others*, where “others” here refers both to other persons like me *and* to the world itself (the environment, nature, etc.), on the assumption that *all* these others have their own desires and/or needs. How do we become aware of the desires and needs of others? By entering into *dialogue* with them.

Biesta has coined the phrase “living in the world in a grown-up way” to capture the idea of perspective or balance described here. “Grown-ups”, in this sense – which is specifically *not* chronological because it both includes many

children and excludes quite a few adults! – do not lose their own subjectivity (desires, goals, etc.), but neither are they entirely driven by their desires to the exclusion of considering what is *desirable*. In slightly different terms, grown-ups temper desire with *judgment*.

There is much to like in this account, not least of which is Biesta's determination to steer between familiar but tempting extremes such as subjectivism and objectivism. I like the idea that it is the job of schools and teachers to "interrupt" the relentless (but flawed) pursuit of "freedom" – viewed inappropriately as satisfying whatever desires one may have – to provide environments which are sustaining (intellectually, affectively, and ethically) and which model and demonstrate the value of careful deliberation and reflection – of *slowing* things down – over the pursuit of quick solutions to problems. These ideas are, by and large, familiar to those of us who have worked in and with Philosophy for Children/In Schools and, more generally, with the transformation of classrooms into *communities of inquiry*.

### *critical comments*

Here, then, is my first mildly critical comment of Biesta's presentation: that he seems not to have fully grasped that we are, indeed, on the same page here. In addition to criticizing what he rightly sees as the contemporary obsession with learning and learning outcomes under the guise of providing students with "Twenty-first Century skills", Biesta questions the transformation from learning to thinking that is one of the distinguishing characteristics of p4c and, more generally, of the work undertaken by students when their classrooms function as inquiring communities in any subject area. He asks if p4c, in thus focusing on thinking – albeit thinking which is "critical, creative and caring" – pays too much attention to the "head" ["mentalisation" in his words] at the expense of other dimensions of our humanity such as "heart" and "soul"; and, if so, whether or not p4c caters adequately for those children who are not particularly verbal. I am not convinced that such terms as "heart" and "soul" are particularly helpful (the former because it is purely metaphorical; the latter because it is difficult to know what it means

outside some religious context); in any case, Biesta seems less concerned with distinguishing specific parts of ourselves than with locating the whole (human) person *in* the world as it is, rather than adopting a framework which sees persons, as thinkers, somehow *outside* it. As far as I can discern, he actually says very little about these “non-cognitive” dimensions of personhood, aside from brief references to the need for schools to provide *sustenance* to students as the latter are confronted with a growing gap between what they desire and what is both possible and desirable. As for his concern for those children who are not particularly verbal – a concern which different p4c practitioners meet in different ways – once again, I do not see any further reference to them; in particular, to how they are to be managed through the cognitive and affective dissonance that he labels “interruption”.

I am intrigued by Biesta’s reading of Levinas, in relation to the role that schools and teachers play in “interrupting” the child’s subjective pursuit of his own desires. On this view, it is precisely when children realize that they cannot always get what they want that they actually begin to *notice their own existence*, i.e. to become *self-aware*. I see several issues worthy of discussion here. One is that Biesta’s own choice of words is *not* in terms of children (subjects) asking questions, but rather being *called into* or put *in question* by confronting the world and what it demands of them. His concern about p4c is that in helping children to ask questions, even “good” questions, it places them *outside* (before) the world, from which vantage point they are taught to question merely in order to “enhance their learning and understanding [of the world] and their comprehensive ‘capacities’”. However, as with Biesta’s implication that much of philosophy, including p4c, is too focused on the “head” at the expense of “heart” and “soul”, I think that he is setting up a “straw-person” here. My understanding of the role of the teacher in p4c is that she precisely should encourage students to *question* their own place in the world among many other things and, further, a primary goal of such questioning is to resolve or settle what they come to see as unresolved or *unsettled* (that the teacher is responsible for provoking this sense of settlement suggests that

she is not merely a facilitator; on this point, and contrary to popular usage in p4c, I agree with Biesta). Elsewhere I have argued that such unsettlement is a necessary condition for any *inquiry*; in any case, it seems to me that it comes very close to what Biesta is striving to capture in his use of the term “interruption” (SPLITTER, 2016).

I also find myself wondering about the idea that the development of an ethical or normative consciousness is the inevitable result of learning (!) to recognize, acknowledge and manage the interruptions referred to. Left to our own individual devices, we would not be able to make the transformation from desire *per se* to what is desirable; hence, the crucial role of the teacher in turning us *toward the world*, with firmness but without coercion. Biesta captures this nuanced sense of what (good) teaching is with such phrases as: “heteronomy without servitude”, “receptivity with reason”, and “obedience which does not alienate”. We see here the recurring theme of allowing children to live fully in the world, rather than being dominated by, or seeking to dominate, it. My question here is this: can the normative transformation from subjective desire to desirability be adequately understood and guaranteed by the presumably contingent encounters with others – both other persons and other entities in the world – that children will undergo (even with the help of teachers)? Or, in slightly different terms, even if such encounters occur, do they provide a sufficient conceptual basis for distinguishing between the (affective) fact of desire and the moral norm of desirability? I shall not discuss this question here, but it does seem to be important; after all, there are several well-known and competing theories of morality, including Aristotelean “virtue” ethics, Kantian deontology, and varieties of utilitarianism, all of which attempt to transcend the contingencies of our actual experience to incorporate a properly normative dimension.

Now to my major concern with Biesta’s presentation: that it encounters some significant conceptual problems which can be overcome by adopting a more “analytic” approach (in the sense of the Anglo-American analytic tradition in philosophy). The analytic tradition is not well-represented among scholars in p4c

due, in large part, to the undeniable historical influence of American Pragmatism. Perhaps my contribution here can serve as a reminder that while philosophy is indeed a multi-faceted discipline, its analytic sub-disciplines, including semantics, logic, philosophy of language and philosophy of mind, have something to offer us, including clear lines of reasoning and argumentation.

*the “problem”: i desire, therefore i exist”*

I applaud Biesta’s insistence that a proper understanding of subjectivity – the “I” – is of vital importance in positioning children in relation to the world around them; further, that the instruments of education (notably teachers, schools and classrooms) are responsible for cultivating a harmonious and balanced relationship between the two. Such a relationship enables us to steer a path – albeit a precarious one – between excluding children from the world (as subjects who, somehow, encounter it from without), and (if I may put it thus) excluding them from themselves by imposing the world upon them. Still, it is reasonable to inquire into the nature of the “I”, *qua* human being or person.

Biesta does allude to one vital characteristic of the desiring child or, rather, of the child who is confronted by the obstacles referred to: for the first time, she *becomes aware of her own existence* and begins to question it (“What am I?”). But here, I suggest, is where problems with this conception of the self emerge. By all means we should embrace the central place that self-awareness (or self-consciousness) plays in this conception (given that non-persons may also be aware of the world around them). A, perhaps *the*, major distinction between myself and a living non-person such as my cat is that I am reflexively aware, i.e. aware that I am aware, thinking, perceiving, wondering, doubting, questioning, etc. My cat, conceptually impoverished as it is (on account of its smaller brain), does not even realize that it is a cat! Several hundred years ago, a famous philosopher proposed that the essence of our personhood (our “selves”) was both subjective and entirely intellectual. “*Cogito ergo sum*” Descartes proclaimed, usually translated as “I think, therefore I exist”. And one of the most powerful and pervasive criticisms of his thesis is that notwithstanding his best efforts (invoking God to guarantee the





correctness of our “clear and distinct ideas” of objects outside the mind), Descartes was unable to bridge the gap between the subjective and the objective: if we understand subjectivity in terms of a *domain of the mental*, we can never make the transition beyond the mind to the world itself. Even using the first-person “I” to pick out an object which happens to be the owner of those thoughts is problematic for the same reason: self-awareness *per se* cannot lead to awareness of an object called “the self” on pain of question-begging.

Coming back to Biesta’s position, it seems that he is advocating a variant of “The Cogito”, along the lines of: “I *desire*, there I exist”. Even though he locates self-awareness at the stage when the desire-obsessed child is compelled to look beyond his own desires, the idea that I become aware of myself as a person, thinker, etc. – i.e. as an object as well as a subject in the world – seems quite mysterious.

I readily confess to being less than completely certain about the force of this criticism. Still, I shall proceed to consider an alternative approach which has direct practical implications for education and p4c.

### *the “solution”: an analytic approach to persons in the world*

The alternative I wish to consider involves a kind of conceptual analysis which can be called “*transcendental*” (championed 250 years ago by Immanuel Kant). In brief, the premise of a transcendental argument is sufficiently common-place as to be generally accepted as true. The argument proceeds conceptually or *a priori* (rather than empirically) to conclude that if we accept the common-place premise(s), then something quite profound (i.e. definitely not common-place) *must* be the case, not so much as a consequence of the premise, but as a *pre-condition* of it.

The common-place premise which concerns us here may be stated thus: “We persons possess a concept of ourselves *as* persons”. Among those who have explored the conceptual implications of this claim is the Twentieth Century

analytic philosopher Donald Davidson.<sup>2</sup> Davidson conveys a powerful holistic understanding of the relationship between persons – as causal agents, as bearers of both mental and physical attributes, and as inquirers into meaning, truth and knowledge – and the world in which they are situated, act and are acted upon (a world which also contains other persons). One concept central to his celebrated theory of meaning and interpretation is that of *belief*, for what we believe plays a central role in what we (claim to) understand, know and (intentionally) do. This concept is, of course, entirely familiar to most language users including children, but Davidson’s analysis of it, summarized below, points to the kind of alternative account of persons and their place in the world at which I have been gesturing<sup>3</sup>.

Belief is a key *propositional attitude*: on the one hand, highlighting each person’s unique psychological or subjective stance on the world, but on the other, implicated in what each of us *knows*, objectively, and in what each of us *does*, objectively, by way of our own agency. Beliefs purport to make true claims about the world, but they are not thereby determined by it, just because we sometimes have false beliefs. Encouraging students to grasp the importance of truth-seeking as a normative ideal, while remaining open to the possibility of error, is a key educational priority.

Beliefs do not come one-by-one, but in clusters and networks. Propositional attitudes that are constitutive of rationality – including beliefs, desires and intentions – come in patterns, not singly or even in a straightforwardly linear arrangement:

[...] we cannot intelligibly attribute any propositional attitude to an agent except within the framework of a viable theory of his beliefs, desires, intentions, and decisions... the content of a propositional attitude derives from its place in the pattern [of the many other attitudes with which it coheres] (DAVIDSON 2001a, p. 221; also DAVIDSON, 1982).

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<sup>2</sup> British philosopher P. F. Strawson, also provided an account of personhood that can be described as “transcendental”. Strawson maintains that persons are those entities to which we attach both physical and psychological predicates and, as such, the concept of *person* is *conceptually primitive* in relation to both physical entities such as (human) bodies and (purported) mental entities such as minds, or even spiritual ones such as souls (STRAWSON 1959).

<sup>3</sup> A detailed examination of these ideas is in Splitter 2011; see also Splitter 2015.

Here we have one of Davidson's signature theses: *the Holism of the Mental* (HM). HM links not only beliefs, but beliefs with other propositional attitudes and their associated behaviors: "Beliefs and desires conspire to cause, rationalize and explain intentional actions." (DAVIDSON, 2001c, p. 125).

HM is a semantic thesis about what is involved, not just in having beliefs, but in understanding the concept of belief (what beliefs are). It tells us that if children are to master this concept and, in turn, concepts which subsume it – including *knowledge* – then they must learn to navigate their way in the domain of *rational discourse*. They must have a good understanding both of how various claims and assertions are connected – as inferences, assumptions, etc. – and of how their own such claims are connected to those of others. We make these connections via language in general, and discourse or dialogue with others, in particular.

The beliefs we hold with respect to a given concept are part and parcel of what it means to *have* that concept (DAVIDSON, 2001c, p. 124). I cannot be said meaningfully to have a belief about democracy if I have no conception or understanding of what democracy is; conversely, I cannot be said to grasp the concept of democracy if there are no beliefs about such entities to which I am prepared to assent. Such semantic constraints throw new light on the familiar idea that children cannot have genuine knowledge about anything which they do not understand (an idea which casts doubt on the merits of rote learning and memorization). Without a significant measure of understanding, it is not just that they would lack *grounds* for believing what they read, recite, are told, etc.; but that they could not even be said to *believe* it. In Davidson's words:

These mental attributes are, then, equivalent: to have a concept, to entertain propositions [including propositional attitudes such as belief], to be able to form judgments, to have command of the concept of truth.<sup>4</sup> If a creature has one of these attributes, it has them all. (DAVIDSON, 1995, p. 9).

The pervasively holistic nature of the mental leaves no room for the old-fashioned, but persistent idea that learning is a linear process which must begin with "the basics". To insist that children can learn before they can make judgments

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<sup>4</sup> Davidson would also add "having command of the concepts of false belief and error" here.

or conceptualize (in short, *think*) reflects an impoverished view of what kinds of beings they are.

The interdependency of subjective attitudes and states – of which belief may be seen as paradigm – on the one hand, and such normative aspects of rationality as truth, knowledge, concept development and judgment formation, on the other, is construed by Davidson in *triangular*, rather than dualistic or binary terms. ...

[...] the basic triangle of two people and a common world is one of which we must be aware if we have any thoughts at all. If I can think, I know that there are others with minds like my own, and that we inhabit a public time and space filled with objects and events many of which are ... known to others. In particular I, like every other rational creature, have three kinds of knowledge: knowledge of the objective world...; knowledge of the minds of others; and knowledge of the contents of my own mind. None of these three sorts of knowledge is reducible to either of the other two, or to any other two in combination. (DAVIDSON, 1998, p. 86-87).

The transcendental nature of this network of relationships is key here. Davidson is *not* arguing that subjective self-awareness, which he takes as given, can somehow be transformed into objective awareness (i.e. knowledge), under certain constraints or conditions which mysteriously confer objectivity. His thesis is that when we understand what it really means to be self-aware, we must already see ourselves as *one among others* – i.e. both other persons like me and other objects in the world.

The implications of Davidson’s ideas for education, while not made explicitly by Davidson himself, are profound. In the words of one commentator, “So, while we find that our knowledge of the world depends on the communication between persons, we also find that the communication between persons depends on our recognition that we occupy a shared world.” (AVRAMIDES, 1999, p. 148). The familiar political tensions among those calling for more “child-centered” forms of teaching, *versus* those calling for more attention to curricula and subject-matter, can be left behind, *as long as* we also take into account the nature and role of inter-personal communication. We think about and reflect on what we encounter in the world, and we engage publicly with others

who are doing the same thing. Such engagement takes many forms, including dialogue.

Further, Davidson's views on mind and language ("thought and talk") provide the conceptual equivalent of Lev Vygotsky's celebrated theory of thought as *internalized* discourse. Underpinning the fact that we develop modes of thinking by way of our linguistic interactions with others (both peers and elders) is a transcendental line of reasoning which binds together my (awareness of my) own thinking and (my awareness of) your thinking. The latter requires language. Here we have a powerful justification for engaging young people (and teaching them to engage) in *dialogue*; dialogue makes possible both the *communication* and the *generation* of thought.

While the concept of dialogue or conversation articulated by Davidson is consistent with the key role that this concept plays in p4c, Biesta's view of dialogue is somewhat puzzling. By allowing that persons, including children, confront a world that may "call them into question", he (echoing Levinas) is suggesting that both non-verbal children *and* non-persons such as plants and schools are participants in dialogue. Perhaps it is my analytic bias, but I cannot make literal sense of this idea. Being "questioned or challenged" by such objects does, indeed, presume the existence of a questioner or challenger, but is it not we persons who fill that role? It shows no lack of respect for the world and its objects to acknowledge the unique place that persons have in regard to them.

Notwithstanding the dispassionately analytic nature of Davidson's writing, it would be a mistake to conclude that he regards thinking, belief, and so on as residing purely "in the head", to return to a concern raised by Biesta. Granted, we will not find in Davidson casual uses of such terms as "heart" and "soul" in the absence of a genuine attempt to articulate their place in some kind of semantic or interpretative framework. Indeed, if we regard language as providing such a framework, there is no reason to deny the legitimacy of such affective concepts as *desire, hope, fear*, etc. In expressing, communicating and sharing with sincerity our desires, hopes and fears we may surely be characterized as "speaking from the

heart”. Moreover, we do not have to deny the affective power of our actions in order to reiterate Davidson’s holistic point that our understanding of emotions – our own and others’ – requires our participation in a linguistic community.

*concluding comment: being aware of, and in the world, among others*

I can envisage Biesta taking issue with the vertices of Davidson’s triangle because they suggest a relationship among different modes of *awareness* (or knowledge) – of myself, of others, and of the world – rather than focusing on the actual world and our place in it. In response, I suggest that since all our experiences are mediated by awareness of some kind, my being aware of the world and its objects is quite different from my being (existing) only as a *component* of that awareness. The triangularity among modes of awareness that Davidson has pinpointed emphasises that each person’s awareness of the world is necessarily connected to his awareness of himself (as being aware) *and* his awareness of others who are also aware. Biesta’s references to dialogue notwithstanding, I find no acknowledgment that each person’s educational (indeed life-long) journey goes beyond a 1-1 relationship with a teacher, to include the multitude of relationships that she has, and will have, with others, including others like her. By contrast, we find the following remark in Davidson: “A community of minds is the basis of knowledge; it provides the measure of all things”. (DAVIDSON, 2001b). Here, I suggest, is a link, hitherto unremarked upon, between Davidson’s holistic views on mind, language and the world, on the one hand, and a distinctive pedagogic and classroom structure based on the notion of a *community of thinkers*, on the other.

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