**Potentialism in education**

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The following articles are based on papers that were presented during a symposium held in the Philosophy of Education Network of the ECER Conference (European Conference for Educational Research) at Dublin, 23-26 September 2016. Here, five scholars from all over the world, addressed the issue of *potentialism* in education. This neologism is meant to describe and articulate a particular understanding of education which is loosely inspired by the work of Giorgio Agamben (1999) on potentiality – a philosopher who plays a significant role in the work of the authors of the papers published in this issue.

To give a first indication of what potentialism is all about, it might be worthwhile to recall, with Klaus Mollenhauer (2013), that in the archaic societies preceding the invention of the school in the Classical Greek Era there were, strictly speaking, *no educational questions*. Before that time, upbringing consisted solely in initiating and socializing the new generation into a given order of things. This is because societal life in archaic times was organized in ways that were seen as naturally given, i.e. as unchangeable. Therefore, the sole commitment of the existing generation consisted of introducing newcomers into a fixed order of things, and leading them to their one and only destination. Since then, it has become conceivable to understand education in terms of the possibility of a (deep) *transformation* of who we are – i.e. in terms of (sometimes unpredictable) changes in the way in which we give shape to our individual and collective lives. As such, educational processes cannot be understood without taking into account this profound capacity for change. The question remains, however, *how* to theorize this capacity.

In recent times this has typically happened in terms of *development* and *self-realization*. This way of looking at education goes together with the growing impact and importance of psychological, medical and neuroscientific paradigms on the one hand, and with the ‘learnification’ of society on the other hand (Cf. Biesta 2010). The articles included in this issue try to take an alternative and more radical route. With Agamben (1999), it can be shown that development and self-realization don’t pertain to real transformation. This is because these definitions of education are predicated upon a particular ontology which regards the non-deterministic side of (human) existence in terms of the actualization of possibilities which are already given and which therefore fully define, and limit, the direction in which we can change. Over and against this, Agamben has tried to conceive of (human) existence in terms of *potentiality*, i.e. a capacity for transformation which is never exhausted by the full realization (possession, appropriation) of predefined, unique possibilities. Because of the predominance of discourses which reduce education to processes of learning and development, the contributors to the potentialism symposium believe it is of the utmost importance to invent a new way of looking at what is at stake in education. Tentatively, they have proposed to call this new approach potentialism.

The articles presented here develop ideas that illustrate what a potentialist approach could consist of. The first two articles, by Tyson Lewis and Igor Jasinski, address the philosophical problems that are behind a reduction of potentiality to the actualization of an already defined/fixed set of possibilities. They also sketch what an alternative conception might look like, and search for a new vocabulary to deal with true newness in education. The next two articles zoom in on concrete educational practices. Joris Vlieghe’s article fleshes out the educational meaning of tiredness in terms of (im)potentiality. In Florelle D’Hoest’s contribution, a potentialist account of teaching philosophy in secondary schools is offered. Although these contributions are all Agambenian qua inspiration, they also rely on other thinkers (e.g. classical phenomenologists and Gilles Deleuze) who might be considered as equally important resources. It was an explicit aim of the symposium to explore which authors and theoretical stances can be used as a background for developing a potentialist approach. The last contribution, by SunInn Yun, draws out interconnections, parallels and differences between the various contributions, and raises critical points and challenges to potentialism in education. The participants of the symposium are particularly grateful to her for delivering an excellent and very detailed response to their papers.

**References**

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