

BY TURNING, TURNING, WE'LL COME 'ROUND RIGHT: TURNING AS AN IMAGE FOR EDUCATION IN PLATO, ARENDT, AND BIESTA

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Abstract

Teachers who are committed to a pedagogy of liberation, who do not want their classrooms to repeat oppression, and who understand themselves to be educating critical thinkers as much as or more than imparting information, have existential difficulties with their role as the authority in the classroom. How to appropriately exercise leadership and craft educational experiences while not usurping the students' autonomy and not reinforcing their sense that learning is external to them is a continual conundrum for the would-be emancipatory critical pedagogue. A rich and engaging metaphor through which a teacher can conceptualize self and process is the action of *turning*. Theorists Plato, Hannah Arendt, and Gert Biesta all employ turning as an image in their analyses of the learning process, and this egalitarian, companionable gesture offers a way forward for teachers. This article examines the different ways each writer uses turning to think about education and suggests implications for teacher identity and classroom practice.

Keywords: Critical pedagogy, liberatory pedagogy, Gert Biesta, Hannah Arendt, Plato, turning, authority, hierarchy

¹This is a reference to the well-known Shaker dance hymn "Simple Gifts."

Turning provides an especially robust and useful image for education and the role of the teacher, one that addresses the particular problem of authority in the classroom and in the educational system that liberatory and critical pedagogues face. Informed by a postmodern, rhizomatic approach to society, and rejecting and even actively seeking to undermine a modernist, hierarchal worldview, educators from feminist, critical race, queer, and other Freireian, critical pedagogies struggle with the role of teacher vis-à-vis the students. If a teacher wishes not to re-enact an oppressive power structure in the classroom, and yet clearly has knowledge and skills potentially of benefit to the students and is in at least a societal sense in charge of the educational environment, just how to teach in a manner simultaneously respectful, non-authoritarian, inclusive, empowering, and consonant with one's own ideological commitments becomes an essential quandary for these pedagogies.

As educators search for a way to exist in the classroom space that is just, pedagogically effective, and personally tenable, a powerful and very physical metaphor can offer a graspable vision of what and how it is possible for us to do and be. Three quite different theorists use the image of turning in their ideas about education: Plato, Hannah Arendt, and Gert Biesta. They each describe a different kind of turning, and in this article, I reflect on what each of these images tells us about the challenges of education, the innate nature of the student, and the possibilities that open up for the teacher committed to a path between being the sole owner of knowledge in the room and being nothing more than a facilitator of learning, to instead giving what Biesta calls the gift of teaching.

I.

In his Axial Age imagining of the creation and governance of the ideal nation-state, Plato famously describes the actual, traumatic, process of learning something new. In Book VI of *Republic* his character Socrates establishes with his interlocutors that the eye has an innate ability to see but that the sun is the necessary cause of sight. He then makes the parallel case that the soul is an organ of knowledge, and

it likewise requires the illuminating sun of the good in order to use that ability and thus understand. Plato develops this idea in Book VII, devising a powerful metaphor to explain why people lack understanding and how they can be educated, clarifying that difference between their innate ability to know and the circumstances required for knowing. Here, Socrates proposes the analogy of the cave and demonstrates that people do not voluntarily choose to move from ignorance to knowledge, but must be forcefully turned towards the source of truth by someone who already knows the extent of those people's misunderstanding and what is required to change that. Socrates says that his interlocutors' analysis of this image

shows that the power to learn is present in everyone's soul and that the instrument with which each learns is like an eye that cannot be turned around from darkness to light without turning the whole body. This instrument cannot be turned around from that which is coming into being without turning the whole soul until it is able to study that which is and the brightest thing that is, namely, the one we call the good. . . . Then education is the craft concerned with doing this very thing, this turning around, and with how the soul can most easily and effectively be made to do it. It isn't the craft of putting sight into the soul. Education takes for granted that sight is there but that it isn't turned the right way or looking where it ought to look, and it tries to redirect it appropriately. (Plato, p. 190)

Many ramifications for education burst forth from this vivid and very concrete metaphor. Foundationally there is of course the fact that people left to their own devices are going to misunderstand very fundamental truths about the nature of the world—and not because they lack the innate ability to know, but because they accept plausible rationalizations from which they have not been redirected. The cave metaphor is so fanciful and extreme that perhaps it even undermines our ability today, in an age of scientific inquiry and information overload, to appreciate just how idiosyncratic people's interpretations of the physical, social, and personal world can be. In assuming that positivistic interpretations of the world obviously lead to truth, we would do well to recall that our own personal empirical data give us no reason to

doubt that the sun circles the earth, coming up in the morning, traversing the sky, and then going down below the horizon in the evening. We are only four centuries beyond Galileo's demonstration that in fact it is the earth that moves around the sun—a counterintuitive truth that the Catholic Church continued to deny for a further two centuries and apologized for denying after yet another two centuries. Furthermore, one in five Americans continues to believe what their eyes tell them: that in fact the sun revolves around the earth (Crabtree, 1999). On a social and personal level, we can easily contemplate the completely contradictory and irreconcilable beliefs people hold with utter certainty regarding the causes and remedies of poverty, which college has the best basketball team, and what really led to their divorce. The need to construct a comprehensible narrative, the seduction of confirmation bias, the populist American valorization of common sense, the difficulty of divergent thinking, the mystification of hegemonic forces—all these things and more keep us clamped in invisible chains, fascinated by phantoms.

Understanding this strange aspect of the human condition means that an educator is a friend who is offering something beyond value, and that is freedom. Even though Socrates's actual purpose in education is to improve the harmony of the city rather than to benefit any particular individual (Plato, p. 191), it is clearly personally liberating to be shown that one's very understanding of reality had been mistaken—the prisoners are literally released from shackles. It is best for the *polis* to have citizens who act from their knowledge of the good, as Socrates intends, but this is not an education of indoctrination, in which the hegemony decides what the people should know, which historical facts to promulgate, what curricular standards to uphold. Socrates, and presumably Plato, believes that education should turn people towards the good, and that will activate their own innate ability to understand their world and to make good judgments for themselves about how they should live.

For us as educators, a balance between (ab)using the position of authority and working for liberation becomes possible in this scenario. The teacher who descends into the cave to free the prisoners is indeed a figure who exerts authority, and even force. The teacher has knowl-

edge that the student does not and is also in a position to insist that the unwilling student make a change. Plato unstintingly makes plain that education is a painful process and involves great struggle, and so we cannot envision a student-led learning process here. The teacher must initiate it, and must push it forward despite student resistance, and that makes the relationship one of authority, of the non-consensual exercise of power. This might be rationalized as justifiable by the enormous stakes at hand—the freedom of the deluded soul—but it is still hierarchical. However, we can characterize this relationship as what the Romans would call *primus inter pares*—first among equals (another model of this would be the twelve-step mentoring system). The teacher has power in this relationship not arbitrarily or by force, but by virtue of having been in the student's position in the past. Having earned the position of power, the teacher, like the recovery mentor, has credibility in asking for the trust of the student. This idea of earned trust is key to the relationship, because the junior partner cannot give fully informed consent ahead of time to a process that has to be lived through to be understood. Therefore, the teacher presents herself as a fellow student who is farther along the same path and whose knowledge is valuable even if it may appear difficult or unpleasant to engage with.

Socrates characterizes this relationship with the companionable gesture of turning the student. In this image, the teacher is not standing facing the student, standing in opposition, power, and judgment; instead, the teacher is standing beside the student with an arm around his shoulders. Exerting pressure, the teacher turns the reluctant student towards something that must be seen before being understood, turning herself in the process as well. Her willingness to undergo the process again, in solidarity with the student, enhances her credibility as someone with the authority of experience, as someone of good will who is not requiring of others something she is not willing to undergo herself. The teacher who is conflicted about her authority understands here that her intention for liberation is essentially companionable rather than oppressive, because its purpose is to show the student how to become an independent subject, rather than to force him into the position of indoctrinated or socialized object.

Respect for the student is built in to Plato's description of the soul

as having all the necessary abilities and needing only redirection—the student is not defective, just lacking knowledge. Given that the discrepancy of power between a liberated teacher and a shackled potential student simply exists, and that the resistance to change characterizes humanity, there could hardly be a more egalitarian physical metaphor for one person to compel another towards something.* Plato does not mitigate the resistance and pain experienced by the student undergoing an existential process of change—the newly liberated captive has to be compelled by the wiser person who is turning him towards the dazzling light (Plato, pp. 187–8)—but he knows that the joy of truth is so great that the enlightened person is willing to undergo hardship and ridicule in returning to free those still shackled and turn them towards the light (p. 190). Plato does not romanticize this as an eager and peaceful embrace of truth; he knows how tightly we cling to our misconceptions and how defensive we can be when they are threatened; turning someone towards knowledge is not easy, but it is fair and respectful.

Proponents of an emancipatory education that does not privilege the hegemony's model of reality become worried by language that values the teacher's knowledge above that of the students. However, if we are not going to abandon the idea that some people are more experienced and knowledgeable than others about some things and that it might be valuable for the younger and less experienced to have some guidance,** then the image of standing side-by-side with an apprehensive student, putting a firm and friendly arm around his shoulders, and turning him towards something he did not know existed is an encouraging and realizable model for a justice-minded teacher.

II.

²On the other hand, as a metaphor, *education* literally means 'leading out,' an image which gives the leader all the power and evinces a certain indifference to whether the other person follows; *inculcation* is literally 'trampling upon' someone.

³This is a particular concern for Biesta, who writes about the constructivist positioning of the teacher as someone "who has nothing to give and . . . is there to draw out what is already inside the student . . . [making learning] as smooth and enjoyable as possible . . . in the hope that students will leave as satisfied customers" (Biesta, 2013, p. 57).

Hannah Arendt, another political theorist of another millennium, also insists on the need for someone who is going to undertake an intellectual life to turn—in this case, to turn inward. A person must turn inwards, towards the self, in order to think, to engage in “a silent dialogue that ‘I’ have with ‘myself’” (Duarte, p. 209). Arendt illustrates this process by describing Socrates “turning his mind to himself” (p. 214). One can see in this image and in her admiration for Cato’s aphorism that “never is one less alone than when one is by oneself” (p. 212) that for her, the withdrawal from the world to think is not just a matter of a single person sitting in solitude but a turning of the public mind away from the activities of the world and inwards to face the private self. In this image, thinking is not a single person journeying to a closed room but a dialogue between two voices within the self, two voices who have both turned their backs upon the world.

The implications about what it is that people need in order to understand their world would seem to be entirely different here than in Plato. Where Plato sees people as doomed to terrible error about the world unless they are made to see an external source of truth that illumines their thinking, it sounds as though Arendt believes that people need to “inquire within,” as the T-shirt says, to discover the truth that in a Zen-like way they already possess. Furthermore, Arendt’s conception of natality drives her to emphasize the imperative to protect the young from being indoctrinated by the pre-existing order, lest the fresh thinking with which they arrive in the world be destroyed. However, in comparing them, we must bear in mind that concerns very different from those of Plato are driving Arendt’s thinking. As an ancient Greek philosopher, Plato belongs to a category of scholarship that no longer exists. He is a multi-disciplinary thinker, trying to delineate a cohesive picture of the nature of unseen reality, the material world, human biology, politics, ethics, sociology, etc. It is important to him to unify his ideas about the world of Forms with his ideas about how the human mind functions, and therefore he needs to posit an external, and eternal, concept to correlate with the functioning of the intellect. Arendt, as a twentieth-century political thinker, might well agree that humans are prone to error in their hypotheses about the world. Her experiences and observations, in World War II and beyond, lead her to emphasize

not a hypothetical and metaphysical source of mental enlightenment, but the immediate influences that shape people's thoughts. She sees those influences not only as dangerous and destructive, as in the case of the Nazis' ability to make the undertaking of evil acts seem acceptable and inevitable, but also as stifling and paralyzing.

It is this essential problem of the human in society, the problem of belatedness, that causes Arendt to see turning inward as necessary. Because we are born into a pre-existing order, our capacity to formulate and develop our own understandings labors under constantly deadening surroundings, as if we live in a room made of acoustical tiles. We cannot conceptualize the way most people on the planet live; we are always already Americans. We do not really know what we think and feel in the presence of nature; we have always already seen the postcard of Grand Canyon National Park. We find it nearly impossible to be as shocked and derailed by Nazism as Hannah Arendt was; she was born into a world where that had not happened, but we have always already seen the photos and studied the battles. If you have read *Number the Stars* in elementary school, how can you become an adult capable of reacting to *Arbeit Macht Frei*?

So, for Arendt, education demands that you turn inward—not away from a source of knowledge, not rejecting Plato's turn, but adding another turn. Arendt does not counsel an effort not to know; this would be impossible anyway. The inner dialogue, in which one converses with oneself as with a friend, remedies, as much as one can hope for, the problem she sees of knowledge and other information overwhelming the self. Whatever knowledge a person has, be it the arguments laid out in a philosophy book or the opinions floating about in the zeitgeist, Arendt believes that it is necessary to turn away from others in order to have the mental space to work through all the material and discover and develop one's own thoughts. As Gert Biesta says, the problem with any paradigm, even one as seemingly positive for people as humanism, is that inevitably each new person can only be a "more or less 'successful'" version of that paradigm (Biesta, 2010, p. 80). The turn inward is the only way to discover one's own self, to be protected from being told how to be human.

For a teacher anxious about the excessive authority he tradition-

ally holds in the classroom, Arendt should be ideologically satisfying. Arendt's strong views on natality bring to the foreground a cautious and respectful attitude towards young people, one that values what they bring into the classroom, rather than placing all the value on pre-existing information that the teacher must write on their blank slates. Her caveats about indoctrinating children and her belief that there cannot be a future if teachers prevent young people from inventing it by forcing them to re-embodiment the past seem very consonant with the Freirean outlook embraced by liberation pedagogues. On the other hand, her dictum to keep education and politics utterly separate appears to be a significant impediment to Freire's vision of a space where the oppressed learn to ask why the present system is what it is and to trace the economic and political forces that had previously been invisible to them. When we understand her to mean instead that teachers are not to espouse political ideologies, for instance the precepts of a totalitarian regime, this makes more sense and retains the intent of intellectual freedom.* As those who write about her ideas on education note, however, this aspect of her thought is hard to conceptualize into practice. A liberal teacher would consider her own classroom, in which students might trace the economic depression of their manufacturing town back to outsourcing, NAFTA, day trading, and union-busting, to be factually accurate and therefore politically neutral in an Arendtian sense, whereas her conservative colleague would consider her to be indoctrinating young people in anti-American propaganda. Whether or not the teacher likes the way the world is, Arendt does not condone teachers or parents who abdicate the responsibility of introducing the child into the world as it is, on the grounds that they

did not make it, and even though they may, secretly or openly, wish it were other than it is. . . . The teacher's qualification consists in knowing the world and being able to instruct others about it, but his authority rests on his assumption of responsibility for that world. *Vis-à-vis* the child it is as though he were a

⁴ As well as clarifying what she means by politics, exploring her understanding of what children are and how they differ from adults is helpful for working through Arendt's views on education and society, which is what Biesta does when he works with her focus on developmental psychology (Biesta, 2013, p. 110).

representative of all adult inhabitants, pointing out the details and saying to the child: This is our world. (Arendt, 1993, p. 189)

The inward turn to think is by definition a very personal experience—that is its entire purpose, to protect individual integrity. A teacher can take steps to preserve natality, creating, as Natasha Levinson (2001) suggests, an intellectual gap between past and present, a space between the acquisition of information and the effort to consolidate and act on it, in which students have the freedom to bring their own perspectives into play. This classroom strategy of building time and opportunities for students to reflect on and integrate new knowledge is related to that pure retreat to think, in that it has to do with ceasing to engage with outside influences and looking inward to know what one personally thinks about something. However, this is not identical to actually having that personal withdrawal. Institutionalizing this in the classroom challenges the emancipatory educator, because it is the antithesis of the world of prescribed curriculum, assessments, and standardized progress. Furthermore, contemporary American culture offers little support for solitude of this type. Barrels of ink, real and digital, have been spilled recently on this topic, especially since the proliferation of smart phones and social media has widened the time that people spend alone but not in thought.

Does Arendt herself support enacting the inward turn for dialogue with the self as an actual component of classroom education? It is hard to know, because on the one hand, she is very clear that the purpose of education is “to teach children what the world is like” (Arendt, 1993, p. 195) and that education belongs more to the social world than the private world, which is “a shield against the world and specifically against the public aspect of the world” (p. 186). Children “by nature require the security of concealment in order to mature undisturbed” (p. 188), and it is the private realm that must protect “the uniqueness that distinguishes every human being from every other, the quality by virtue of which he is not only a stranger in the world but something that has never been here before” (p. 189). This all suggests that the inward turn belongs to the private world, not the social world of education. She certainly objects to children being used as proxies in adult social and political struggles, as we see throughout her “Reflections on Little

Rock,” and Arendt goes so far as to align “educating the children in the spirit of the future” with tyrannical political utopianism (Arendt, 2000, p. 246), and the whole spirit of that article leads the reader to believe that she finds it imperative for the school not to encroach upon the private realm, where uniqueness is properly fostered. Elsewhere, though, she is adamant that it is indeed the domain of education to protect natality, that it “must preserve this newness and introduce it as a new thing into an old world” and so “educate in such a way that a setting–right remains actually possible” (Arendt, 1993, p. 192). Therefore, it is difficult to be sure whether Arendt would say that the literal private act of turning inward to think in dialogue with the self belongs at school as part of education’s preservation of natality or at home as part of the private world where uniqueness is to be cultivated.

Regardless, it may be the case that teachers are unlikely to be able to employ the inward turn as a classroom pedagogy; literally providing private space for students to retreat to in order to think would usually be physically impossible as well as unsupported by the administration, and indeed perhaps not suitable for the limited number of minutes a teacher has with a group of students. However, not everything that is valuable in a person’s education can be enacted in the classroom—travel for instance—yet teachers still have a duty to teach about doing those things. Just as many a student has learned from a wise teacher about significant books to read or places to visit or works of art to experience, and later gone on to do these things, a teacher’s words about how and why to turn inward for a dialogue with the self might be revelatory. In a search for strategies that address a concern with the use and misuse of authority, a teacher can employ this second kind of turn as another way to visualize how to employ his position of knowledge and power to educate without indoctrinating, without abrogating the student’s autonomy. As the wiser and more experienced person, the teacher can, through classroom practice, modeling, and advice, help the student undertake a turn inward to learn in dialogue with the empowered self.

III.

Building on the work of Hannah Arendt and Emmanuel Levinas, contemporary Dutch education theorist Gert Biesta writes about what is required to become a fully realized human subject—not just a unique individual, possessing freedom to act, but an irreplaceable subject. Subjectification for Biesta “articulates that being and becoming a subject are thoroughly relational” (Biesta, 2010, p. 129), that we can only become subjects in the presence of others, and this underpins a third turn: towards each other.

Biesta identifies three overlapping goals of education: qualification, socialization, and subjectification. The former two have great potential to be oppressive, as the interests of the state and the culture compete with the interest of the individual and tend to overpower it. That is, while it does benefit the individual and the culture for people to gain knowledge and skills and to be socialized into their culture, the greater power of national and cultural interests added to the tyranny of the measurable mean that the qualification and socialization functions overwhelm the subjectification function of education. However, Biesta (2010) says that “an education worthy of its name should *always* contribute to processes of subjectification that allow those educated to become more autonomous and independent in their thinking and acting” (p. 21).

The irony of declaring the development of the human being as a goal, though, is that, as we saw above, Biesta has rejected humanism as another oppressive template, one that “posits a *norm* of ‘human-ness,’ a norm of what it means to be human, and in doing so excludes those who do not live up to or are unable to live up this norm” (p. 79). So, in the name of liberation we have zeroed in on yet another externally determined ideology, one that “specifies what the child, student, or newcomer *must* become before giving them an opportunity to show who they are and who they will be” (p. 79). In order to articulate a kind of subjectification that we can understand and educate for, Biesta says that we can do this “without a template” (p. 81) by conceptualizing it as a coming into presence as unique beings. Biesta understands uniqueness as a quality that comes into being only in the presence of

another, and in fact only in the presence of others, in a pluralistic community where we are forced to be singular because there are not commonalities to rely on. His point is not that we exist as unique, but that our uniqueness has some consequence in the world, and, he says, this

matters when I am being addressed, when someone appeals to me, when someone calls me. Those are situations when I am singled out by the other, so to speak. And in those situations— if the other is after *me*, not after me in my social role (which would be my identity)— we are irreplaceable. (Winter, 2011, p. 539)

“It is in those situations,” Biesta (2010) says, “that our uniqueness matters and it is therefore in those situations— neither before nor after— that we can be said to be constituted as unique, singular subjects rather than as specimens of a more encompassing order” (p. 89). This intertwining with the Other as crucial to the creation of a Self unique in the context of society comes from Biesta’s engagement with Levinas’s generation of an ethics of subjectivity, such that “my unique subjectivity . . . emerges from my singular, unique responsibility” (Biesta, 2013, p. 20); that is, we become ourselves in our *response-ibility* to others. So, to include subjectification in our classrooms, to educate for something more than qualification and socialization, means turning people into relationship, into communication, into presence with each other.

As an image for education, this third turn again challenges some of the traditional modes of relationship in the classroom. We have had to picture ourselves turning the student towards new knowledge, rather than standing before the student as the source of all information; we have had to imagine how to turn the student inward to think for herself, rather than standing before her obviating any need to think; now we have the image of an interpersonal turn and we wonder how we can carve out space for and justify an activity that in form and value runs counter to so many pressures.

One of the several difficulties a teacher must resolve or ignore is the rising personal culture of media connectivity that we saw above in discussing solitude. Although Americans go to great lengths not to be alone with themselves, they also have created structures for themselves

that preserve them from having to be genuinely together with others either. Texting, social media, the decline of affiliations and clubs, and the move to the private world of things that used to be public such as movies and shopping speak to not only a deterioration of interpersonal skills, but also a different mental model for how we encounter others. Another block to our desire to be in the presence of another person is the American valorization of independence and individualism. Lone cowboys squinting off past the horizon do not need other people, and a nation enamored with that self-image will reject pressure to engage and value the full presence of others. Our default understanding of value is also a difficulty. Biesta evinces great concern about the damage done by capitalism and its inherent functions of putting a price on everything, convincing us we should always have what we want and flattering us about our own worth. Advertising trains us to expect some personal advantage from a transaction. All of these factors fuel a culture of individual achievement and educational measurement against which Biesta positions questions of how educators can embody, enact, engender—and convince others to value—the unmeasurable. Relationships that have been monetized are not places of authenticity. Uniqueness is not a commodity.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for a classroom pedagogy of interpersonal turning is that it is in fact different from traditional classroom relationships. The teacher-student relationship is normally insulated by the school hierarchy. Teachers maintain a professional façade, and their well-defined roles protect them from getting too close to students. The student-student relationship within the class is also formal and traditionally conducted within strict boundaries, often allowing for little or no interaction, as the transaction generally is restricted to interchanges between the class as a whole and the teacher. A teacher who wants to create unscripted encounters between himself and a student or between students is risking a great deal. Those who locate the teacher's power over the class in their perception of him as a distant and somehow different kind of being would fear a breakdown in the entire functioning of the class. The teacher is also risking more personal exposure than he may really want—like counselors and other professional helpers, teachers use their professional distance to protect themselves from

being intruded on and overwhelmed by a greater volume of personal contact than they can stand. Creating more personal connection between students is also a fraught proposition, as the emotional fallout is far beyond the control of the teacher, and it is not unreasonable for students, especially younger ones, to understand the social contract of the classroom as providing them with emotional safety.

However, Biesta tells us that it is completely necessary that we come to grips with what he calls the beautiful risk of education. If we as teachers are going to reject an instrumental, transactional version of education, one that “sees communication as the transmission of information from one person to another or, in more abstract terms, from one location to another,” then we have to accept the alternative: seeing communication “as a process of meaning and interpretation . . . radically open and undetermined . . . and risky” (Biesta, 2013, p. 26). In seeing communication

as a generative process of participation through which things—in the widest sense of the word—are made ‘in common,’ . . . we are embracing “a process that always entails a risk. To take the risk out of communication would mean to turn it back into a form of transportation where communication would lose its dialogical potential, that is, its ability to do justice to all who take part. (p. 43)

These very factors, though, are also what make turning students towards other people another answer for teachers searching for ways to educate for emancipation and to teach less from atop a throne of authority. A pedagogy of interpersonal turning can create a space in which students have to encounter each other and make sense of their respective understandings of a question, of a situation, of the world. Biesta (2013) builds on Dewey’s idea of communication as a meaning-generating process—that meaning comes into being in dialogue—when he says that “meaning only exists *in* social practices, it is, in a sense, located *in-between* those who constitute the social practices through their interactions” (p. 31). Undertaking this turning certainly challenges the fortitude of teachers who believe they have an ideological commitment to a less authoritarian mode of teaching, given the distance between teaching a structured lesson with measurable learn-

ing outcomes and opening space for an event in which subjectivity and meaning may emerge. In the latter scenario, a teacher may feel she is arriving empty handed.

Yet this empty-handedness is not necessarily a bad thing, because it precisely puts us in a position where we realize that our educational interest in the emergence of subjectivity is not to be understood in terms of production, in terms of strong metaphysical creation, but rather requires a different kind of educational response and a different kind of educational responsibility. (Biesta, 2013, pp. 22–23)

Biesta offers no guarantees: turning students towards each other opens a dialogue “beyond our control and fundamentally out of our hands. . . . [but] it is only when we are willing to take this risk that the event of subjectivity has a chance to occur” (p. 23).

IV.

Envisioning and practicing these three turnings does not eliminate the fact that the teacher is still in charge of a class of students, nor should this be seized upon as a way to disguise that fact, an inherent dishonesty that would of course undermine anything that might be achieved. Embracing all these ideas about companionably turning students towards what they need to know, helping them turn inwards to converse with themselves, and inventing ways for them to turn towards others as unique subjects—doing these things is still assuming a position of authority and of knowledge of what would be best for someone else, someone who is not in a position of informed consent. Teaching is in fact essentially manipulative, a crafty craft. Even if she is genuinely open to whatever may happen in an interpersonal encounter, it is still the teacher’s game, and the students are still looking to her to make sense of it. However, turning people is not leading them or pushing them; it is initiating something that only the student can then do. It is therefore experiential for them, and as Biesta and Dewey say, knowing can come only from experience. This is the education that liberation pedagogues strive for, the opposite of the banking model, a space where the teacher is not handing down information from on high but is turning the student towards knowing. Like the finger pointing at the moon, the teacher makes herself not the end, but the means.

This shift in position, this movement from behind the lectern to sitting with the students, makes the teacher more valuable, not less; as Biesta describes, it is a move from being merely a master explicator to living in a praxis with wisdom.

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