Chapter 17
Non-affirmative Education Theory as a Language for Global Education Discourse in the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract Given the crisis of neoliberal education policy in operation since the 1990s, non-affirmative theories of general education, didactics, and subject matter didactics provide a productive language for global education discourse in the twenty-first century. This school of thought has the capacity to operate as a global meta-language of education due to how it defines the teaching-studying-learning process and how it perceives the dynamic relationship between different forms of societal practices. Given that education praxis occurs at different levels, and does not affirmatively mediate between the learner and society, and educates for a nonhierarchically organised societal praxis, teaching needs to recognise but not instrumentally affirm neither societal interests nor the learner's life world. Rather, non-affirmative pedagogy helps us to identify and empirically study, at different levels, how education co-creates pedagogical spaces for discerning thought and reflexive practices around experiences, knowledge, and values. The approach offers itself as an alternative to contemporary educational policies such as academic factualism, educational performativism and competencism, pedagogical activism, and instructional technologism.

Keywords Global education discourse · Education for the twenty-first century · Academic factualism · Performativism · Educational activism · Technologism

In several ways, this volume scrutinised how the research programme on the non-affirmative theory of education and Bildung provide us with conceptual language to analytically and empirically deal with present-day local, national, and global developments and needs in teaching, curriculum work, and educational governance. Throughout the volume, we asked and tried to answer what strengths the non-affirmative approach offers in conceptualising the relationship between Bildung and education as it pertains to a non-teleological view of the future. The point of

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departure was to apply an unorthodox and problematising approach to non-affirmative theory, as it obviously would be a contradiction to treat non-affirmative theory affirmatively. Thus, we need to not only revisit but also partly *rethink* the modern heritage of the theory of education.

The contributions, in different ways, took their point of departure from the long-standing tradition of non-affirmative education theory. As Dietrich Benner pointed out, versions of the constitutive principles are already visible in Plato's way of understanding teaching as an initiative to engage the learner in the pedagogical process. The contributions represented unique and creative voices that deepened some of the assumptions and broadened the applicability of this General Pedagogy approach. For example, in line with previous research, this volume argued that educational leadership needs to be grounded in education theory rather than in organisation theory or policy research and that non-affirmative theory serves such a purpose very well (Uljens, 2015; Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017). By communicating and clarifying the fundamental features of the position, readers were offered the opportunity to learn about the features of the approach. By pointing at what questions this theory aims to answer, the reader may evaluate whether the questions posed are the right ones and if how they were answered are reasonable. In this treatment of non-affirmative education theory, the volume itself aims to follow the principles of educative teaching and summon the reader to engage self-reflectively with the presented ideas, which is a feature of academic reasoning. Indeed, the volume avoided treating non-affirmative theory in affirmative and non-critical ways.

The volume started with the assumption that when profound changes in societies occur, education becomes a central topic of societal debate. Thus, theories of education strongly interweave with societal development at large. Theorising education, therefore, represents a sort of cultural self-reflection on a collective level. Not only educational policies and practices but also educational theories tell us something about who we are and what we want to be for ourselves and others. In this sense, education theory, at some level, always demonstrates anthropological reasoning. In addition, accepting the historicity of conceptual reasoning in education and Bildung means accepting that any education theory is valid only relative to its cultural and historical conditions. While universal theories are not possible, general theories are. Taking this condition seriously, the volume argues, we need to articulate in and for what kind of world we theorise about education and what we expect to achieve with such conceptualisations. So, what do we see, and what do we need?

After the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, for many years, European air was full of hope. However, in the aftermath of the 'market state' that came to dominate after 1989 (Reis, 2012), we saw an increasing number of problematic consequences, such as the deregulation of laws, the decentralisation of administration, an increased focus on cost-benefit reasoning and efficiency orientation, in addition to increased privatisation of education and technological standardisation. While technology made the world smaller, we also witnessed increasing cultural plurality and tensions within nation-states, reflecting neo-conservative nationalist movements all over the world. In addition to these

developments, ecological challenges have risen to new, previously unanticipated levels.

We have witnessed an orientation towards performative and competency-based curricula and an idea of increased individual choice in school matters. We have witnessed a reduced focus on egalitarianism and a reduced interest in minimising disparities. The concentration of economic wealth is widely discussed. Over the past 30 years, we have seen the movement from an idea of education serving democratic ideals, citizenship education, and the promotion of humanistic ideals to increasingly viewing education and cultural expression as tools serving economic ends.

It is widely acknowledged that the shift towards neoliberal education policies that promote competition as a vehicle to improve educational outcomes, as well as corresponding technologies of governance (Pettersson et al., 2017), has had profound consequences for professional activity, identity, and development in the education sector (Normand, 2016). These ongoing changes are far from being simply functional or organisational; they are also ideological. There is also a risk of transforming educational research to serve either as a tool for instrumental efficiency or as some form of ideologically driven activism. Interventionist action research and school developmental approaches have grown strong after three decades of the use of the qualitative methodology. Some of the interventionist approaches have been tamed to serve policy-directed school improvement; other approaches represent more emancipatory approaches. As shown in this volume, non-affirmative education theory does indeed possess the own necessary qualities to operate as a theoretical platform for school development research that is neither instrumental nor affirmative.

Both expected and unintended consequences have resulted in increasing mistrust regarding whether the global neoliberal policy provides sustainable solutions for guiding reform in the public sector, including education. Nationalist tendencies have been strengthened all over the world. These counterproductive consequences make it central to see connections between neoliberal economic globalisation, national and transnational governance policies, educational ideals, curriculum, teaching, and leadership practices. While the tradition of didactics, most often framed by a nation-state perspective, is still relevant given the crucial character of the nation-state as an organising body, a transnational or 'globopolitan' (Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017, p. 107f) perspective needs to complement the nation-state perspective because of increasing interdependency across all societal sectors.

Although the volume is extensive regarding topics discussed, not all possible issues were scrutinised. For example, regarding the existential and co-existential aspects of non-affirmative theory, we may ask: What social practices, in addition to education, deserve to be identified in a theory of education? Over the years, there have existed many bids regarding which societal and human practices should be included. Schleiermacher (1826) identified ethics, politics, and education. In addition to these, Flitner (1961) pointed out theology, while Fink (1978) and Derbolav (1987) argued for broader systems.

However, perhaps more central than arguing which human practices are included in such systematisation is the idea that these practices are non-hierarchical. The non-hierarchical relations between societal forms of practice, incorporated as an essential feature premise in non-affirmative General Pedagogy, make historical sense only after embracing a non-teleological cosmology regarding how we explain the origin and future of the world and humanity. Therefore, while the constitutive principles are valid a priori, the regulative principles receive their validity because they indeed make sense when we explain how education relates to other societal forms of practice in liberal and modern societies. They are especially helpful in assisting the analysis of the task of education in democratic policies. Neither the constitutive principles nor the non-teleological view, combined with liberalism as represented, for example, by the Finnish Hegelian philosopher Johan Vilhelm Snellman, stood in no conflict with later developments toward a contemporary form of political democracy.

Today we need to ask: 'How should *nature* be incorporated into such a system of existentials and co-existentials?' One might argue that nature is already indirectly present in accepting corporeality as an existential aspect besides reason, language, and history. Yet nature cannot be reduced to human corporeality. In a Hegelian tradition, nature is primarily related to the co-existential 'work'. It is by moulding nature and transforming nature into a culture that the human being identifies herself as human. However, in such a view, there is a risk of subordinating nature to human interests and not endowing it with a value of its own. Today, when humanity has realised that not only human culture depends on nature, but also that nature is dependent on culture, the role of nature in discussing existential and co-existentials must be addressed anew. In the future, we need to develop a view where we consider nature an ultimate foundational principle or factor beyond any kind of existential and co-existential elements, and that is something that all other human practices must consider.

Given shared global dilemmas there is an increasing need for an intercontinental dialogue on education, teaching, and learning. Such a dialogue requires a shared conceptual language. This volume has argued such a language may develop by making explicit and rethinking fundamental features of the *modern tradition* of theorising education, teaching, and learning. This strategy is arguably viable, as the seminal concepts of the modern tradition form a shared point of reference when aiming to explain education theoretically. Despite considerable variation in reception and later developments, the modern pattern of thought implicitly carries curriculum-making and teaching practices across varying political and cultural contexts globally.

While increasing research specialisations within education indeed help us describe the "different parts of the elephant", the societal developments of the past decades clearly point towards a need for a more general and all-encompassing approach to education theory that operates with a systemic ambition and complementary perspectives instead of disparate and exclusionary ones. This volume accepted the challenge of responding to an existing and urgent need to find new ways of conceptualising education, ways that take us beyond the instrumentalist competency paradigm promoted by economics.

This book was authored and edited with the conviction that the non-affirmative theory of education offers itself as a more comprehensive language of education, especially in comparison with given education policy developments worldwide over the past three decades. However, we do not wish to end up repeating a battle between, for example, conservative and transformative ideals of education. Such approaches tend to, in the end, make education a tool for external interests in ways that may endanger the political ideals of democratic societies and limit the space for knowledge-informed public rational reasoning. In this light, non-affirmative education theory offers itself as an alternative for the twenty-first century. How does the non-affirmative approach to the *theory* of education differ from existing schools of thought?

In dealing with these contemporary challenges in educational policymaking and theorising, one idea often recurs. According to this frequently occurring answer, the solution lies in radically reforming and redirecting present-day education practices, as they appear inappropriate concerning existing and future challenges. The argument is that continuing such practices would only prolong an unfavourable situation, as new generations would continuously be socialised into practices that do not contain the required solutions. Instead, research should contribute to renewed policies and the development of new curriculum ideals and practices, as well as new leadership policies that can turn things right for the future. This is precisely the argumentation structure that Rousseau (1762) applied in his famous preface to *Émile* in advocating for a new, transformative, or reformative education practice. Here, education was the instrument for creating a new, preferred social order. From twentieth-century history, we can find many examples of how normative education ideals and policies, put into practice by affirmative education, have not hindered developments opposite to the intended ones. The fall of the Berlin Wall is a paradigmatic example. East-German normative education did not stop people from tearing down the Berlin Wall.

Instead of continuing to turn to normative education after WWI, many Western countries put their hope in a democratic education ideal combined with a high educational level. This is the solution we have applied to solve many global developments. Also, today, many voices require a strengthened focus on policies promoting critical, constructive, and responsible individuals and citizens, with reflected personal identity, cultural belonging, and political awareness. Such subjects, the argument goes, would be capable of recognising others and being socially responsible, extending the responsibility to future generations. A long tradition of broad self-formation or Bildung-centred education shares these ideals and values (Klafki, 1994; Benner, 2015). In other words, Western education policies have, for decades, approved of, defended, and practised such ideals as leading principles. Education for personal and cultural identity, political and economic citizenship, and education for global humanity and international solidarity has been strongly guiding principles. Despite education along these ideals for the past 50 years, we have witnessed the previously mentioned increase in global competition, new ecological challenges, curricular developments oriented towards more performative competencies, and accountability-based leadership and evaluation practices. In such a scenario, we

may ask whether non-affirmative education theory is a solution or part of the problem. Perhaps stronger ideological and normative positions in education theory that support rather than question education policies are the right way to go. This idea takes us to the core of the tasks of academic education and scientific research. Non-affirmative education theory defends the preservation of spaces for critical reflection, spaces that are not limited to serving pragmatic or ideological interests of various kinds. The idea of the critically reflecting and acting citizen in cultural, ecological, political, and knowledgeable questions is still worth pursuing, especially if we appreciate a citizenship that is capable of thinking beyond what is and acting in the interests of all. To conclude, although they overlap, educational theorising is not the same as educational policymaking. If they are not the same, how should we move beyond theories that subordinate educational practice to politics in unproblematic ways, either in a socialisation- or transformation-oriented sense? If we value developing citizenship featuring a democratic mindset, then moving beyond such positions is necessary.

Non-affirmative Theory as a Critical Theory

Despite all socially organised education being political and despite all educational theory featuring values, this volume assumed it would be a mistake to equate pedagogical practice with political practice. Similarly, it would be a mistake to equate educational theory with curriculum policy, political ideology, or political utopia. Education and politics are related, yet we cannot deduce either from the other without violating the idea and character of each. In a non-democratic polity, education is, by definition, strictly subordinate to politics. In any version of politically democratic societies—liberal, conservative, republican, or some other—the task of education is to prepare for political reflection and the readiness to act and participate in self-directed ways. Such education is, of course, also value-bound in that it recognises and respects political freedom of thought and the right to political convictions. However, such education is not about deciding what direction political interests should take. Such pedagogical practice does not take any ideology for granted but problematises them all for pedagogical reasons, thereby creating opportunities for learners to make up their minds. In this light, non-affirmative education is anarchistic in a limited pedagogical sense of the word. It does not reject the state as a liberal mode of social organisation.

There is a moral imperative inherent in non-affirmative education theory. For example, while teaching in schools needs to make established knowledge accessible to students, teachers' responsibilities are not limited to affirming culture, existing societal practices or future political or educational ideals without making them objects of critical reflection by students. Such behaviour would imply reducing education to art, aiming at fulfilling given, specified aims that overlook the students' contribution to establishing the meaning of these contents and aims.

Education would then result in technical instrumentalism. Still, by law, leaders and teachers in public school systems are expected to follow the spirit of a curriculum and must recognise such interests.

Non-affirmative Theory in Understanding School Teaching

While the first part of the volume clarified the fundamental features of non-affirmative education theory, Part II of the volume dwelt on these assumptions, especially from the perspective of educational teaching in schools. In his chapter, Thomas Rucker convincingly demonstrates how a non-affirmative approach to Didaktik/didactics implies a view of school teaching that is educative. He clarified how both school teaching and school development appear in the light of non-affirmative education. His contribution identifies various dimensions of non-affirmative, which are important in the context of educative teaching, namely, objective insight, value judgements, and many-sidedness. His point was that when school development is focused on developing teaching in schools, these dimensions of educational teaching operate as guiding criteria.

In her chapter, Ling Lin continued arguing for the benefits of turning back to Herbart's ideas of educational teaching. Her point was to demonstrate how big data-based measurement and assessment in education, which are expanding worldwide, conceptually obscure the relationship between teaching and learning. In short, these assessment programmes systematically overlook that 'studying' mediates between teaching and learning outcomes. Therefore, learning outcomes are not valid indicators of the quality of teaching. Numerical symbols are incapable of opening up the relational dynamics between teaching and students' studying activities.

Part II ended with Michael Uljens' chapter on a Bildung-based, non-affirmative interpretation of school didactics. Given that learning occurs everywhere, there is reason to identify the specific nature of school learning. Viewing education as a multilevel phenomenon, the chapter demonstrated not only how the constitutive but also the regulative principles developed by Dietrich Benner were highly relevant from a school-based didactic perspective. The idea of didactics as a science, not of the teaching-learning process, but the teaching-studying-learning process, as argued 25 years ago, was conceptually clarified by making use of the notions of summoning to self-activity and Bildsamkeit. The chapter also pointed out that this education theory emphasises that understanding teaching in classrooms requires relating it to pedagogical dimensions of educational leadership at different levels. If the regulative principle, called the 'transformation of societal interests into legitimate pedagogical practice', is expected not to violate the realisation of non-affirmative educative teaching, then the pedagogical dimensions of school leadership, governance, and school development also need to follow the same principles. A non-affirmative curriculum and governance policy are easier to apply in democratic societies with a multi-partisan electoral system, while governments in two-party systems, or bipartisan politics, more often and more strongly make use of the

education system to push their own political agendas. This demonstrates how dilemmas in education systems may point to a need to reform the political culture, not least regarding bipartisan electoral systems. Given the globally influential role of the US, the ongoing development of its bipartisan political life is worrying.

Non-affirmative Education and Related Theoretical Positions

Following the ideal of non-affirmative treatment of non-affirmative education theory, Part III of the volume broadened the topics towards related theoretical positions.

Andrea English demonstrated how the non-affirmative approach relates to the Deweyan understanding of education. She reminded readers of the primacy of listening to teachers' work. Listening as a mode of pedagogical activity reflects recognising the student's voice. Listening also creates space for students to voice their own interpretations, thus making them an object for shared reflection. Such a pedagogy requires tact. Learning to *listen* to the content of others' argumentation is also an important aspect of public discourse that carefully engages with the difference between opinion and knowledge.

For more than half a century, the ideals of social justice have been guiding principles in organising education all over the world. Today, the concept covers many more aspects than how families' socioeconomic status influences students' school performance. In contemporary school systems, positive discrimination is a widely applied policy. Despite the crucial role of the distributive view of justice, Juan José Sosa Alonso argues for the need to develop a complementary perspective on justice in education. By drawing on Gadamer's and Foucault's interpretations of Plato, the chapter identifies the possibility for non-affirmative theory to deal with justice as a virtue, evolving in and through the pedagogical process. Only in this way can we ensure a just society.

While teaching includes making the world accessible from various perspectives, teaching itself also features unique forms of interpretative activity and understanding present in the pedagogical relationship. The chapter by Michael Uljens and Mari Mielityinen argues for two ways of dealing with hermeneutics in education. In the first step, they argue for the need to utilise different notions of subjectivity and intersubjectivity when talking about the pedagogical process. While the learner already shares the world with the teacher in some sense, education aims to establish new ways of sharing the world, thereby aiming at a different kind of intersubjectivity than the one from which education started. The same holds true for subjectivity. This chapter then views summoning and Bildsamkeit as notions that speak about the transformation between various ideas of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. This process involves different interpretative activities that hermeneutics helps us talk about.

In the final chapter in this section of the volume, Johannes Türstig and Malte Brinkmann turn to Egon Schütz's phenomenology and Pierre Bourdieu's sociology to expand Dietrich Benner's interpretation of non-affirmative education. The critique started by questioning the dualism between socialisation and Bildung-oriented

transformation. To overcome this dualism, the chapter argues that by accepting the primacy of the life world, habits and opinions form the foundation of justice. Given this, habitus cannot only be seen as an object to be affirmed or transformed. The phenomenological and sociological approach then allows us to talk about the lived dimensions of pedagogical practice as they relate to power dimensions in society.

Taken together, these four chapters are successful both in expanding the interpretations of non-affirmative theory and in problematising some of the basic assumptions of non-affirmative education theory.

Non-affirmative Education and Empirical Research

Two developments feature more recent empirical education research. The first is an interest in asking how educational research may support school development. The second is an awareness of understanding education from a multilevel perspective. These are not the only characteristics, but they are obvious and global. The three chapters of Part IV of the volume deal with these two developments from the perspective of non-affirmative education theory.

The first chapter, by Hanno Su and Johannes Bellmann, continues a sort of non-affirmative treatment of non-affirmative education theory. In their chapter, they point out some aspects they found inconsistent regarding non-affirmative. The main point of the chapter was, however, to reflect on whether a non-affirmative theory of education necessarily requires a non-affirmative concept of educational research and how such an approach would differ from empirical-analytic, historical-hermeneutic, and ideology-critical approaches. While these positions are primarily epistemological, they remain silent regarding the research object—pedagogical processes. Su and Bellman then argued that empirical research based on these approaches is affirmative. Partly drawing on research by Jacques Rancière, the chapter concluded by pointing out the possibilities for developing non-affirmative action research.

The second chapter in this section is a comparative study of how non-affirmative education theory relates to the fourth generation of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), which was developed by Yrjö Engeström. While the approaches obviously differ, they also share many of the same root assumptions. Both theories highlight the cultural-historical context of education and recognise the importance of education as aiming to support an individual's achievement of autonomy and emancipation through self-activity. The chapter perceived non-affirmative education theory primarily as an initiative within systematic education to ontologically conceptualise education by identifying foundational features as cultural and historical phenomena. In turn, CHAT was perceived as a general systems-theoretical approach to be used as a point of departure for action research aiming to achieve a change in praxis, yet not by directing praxis from an outside interest. The chapter argued that CHAT, in its different steps for the research-supported development of praxis, makes use of

constitutive principles from NAT. However, CHAT does not contain much of the normative character of the pedagogical interventions it promotes.

Taken together, these two chapters contributed new perspectives regarding how research-supported school development might be designed. Non-affirmative theory offers a theory of educational praxis and does not treat any societal praxis with the same universal apparatus that CHAT does. In turn, CHAT represents an internationally widespread approach to action research regarding its design.

With the growing awareness of the role of educational governance in school development initiatives, it is clear that we need to pay more attention to educational leadership as a topic for educational research. All too often, the perspective is limited to either the classroom or the individual school. Especially if empirical research focuses on the regulative principle of how societal interest transforms into legitimate pedagogical practice, then educational leadership cannot be grounded in organisational theory. In her chapter, Ann-Sofie Smeds-Nylund highlights the dilemmas related to municipal leadership. Like some other chapters in the volume, Smeds-Nylund was able to point out how empirical research on educational leadership, starting from non-affirmative theory, can utilise ideas developed by Vivien Schmidt regarding discursive institutionalism.

Non-affirmative Education and Contemporary Curriculum Policies

The last section of the volume, Part V, consists of a critical discussion of contemporary educational governance policies. This section started with a chapter by Leif Moos, in which he introduces the main tensions developed in Part V of the book. He discerned and identified features of, on the one hand, a democratic Bildung discourse that developed during the ideal of the social-democratic welfare state and, on the other, an outcomes-based discourse that developed over the past 30 years in the so-called neoliberal competition state. Utilising Foucault's view of discourse, he then reflected on a kind of contract government in Denmark.

As the next step in this section, Andreas Nordin addressed transnationally occurring and very influential principles in data-driven curriculum policymaking. Following the distinction made by Leif Moos, Nordin reminded us that this global discourse also follows certain educational ideals (i.e. competitiveness, objectivity, and distance). In the reconstructive part of his chapter, he supports non-affirmative education theory as an alternative and more reflexive language for policymaking.

If non-affirmative education theory is to be perceived more broadly as a fruitful idea, then there is a need for a comparative dialogue between the Bildung paradigm and, for example, twenty-first-century competencies. In his chapter, Armend Tahirslay delves into the similarities and differences between these two schools of thought.

Finally, while policy borrowing is indeed an old-age phenomenon, in a globalised world, this phenomenon has not diminished. Policy borrowing has been studied in several ways. Using non-affirmative education theory, this chapter describes the reception of foreign education theories in China. Bangpin Din argued that while China applied an affirmative mode of policy borrowing for most of the previous 100 years, the modus of reception has developed into a sort of reflected non-affirmative engagement with perspectives developed in other cultures. He exemplified this with how German Didaktik was introduced at the beginning of the twentieth century and how Kairov's pedagogy was imported from the Soviet Union. The more recent engagement with contemporary curriculum theory and European Didaktik (didactics) features a more reflective attitude.

Non-affirmative Education Theory as a Language for the Twenty-First Century

Throughout the volume, we have argued that the non-affirmative education theory is not a value-neutral position. It defends certain educational ideals, which are essential for democratic politics and a view of the future as non-teleological (i.e. laying in the hands of humanity itself). There is still reason to remind us of the difference between emphasising autonomy as an educational ideal and emphasising what ideals this autonomy should strive for. In this sense, the distinction between affirmative and non-affirmative in some respects, may be seen as two positions on a continuum rather than two excluding positions. Due to its relative openness and by avoiding narrow normative, prescriptive recommendations, the approach may operate as an analytical vehicle in empirical settings to ask how and to what extent educational policies or practices promote legitimate educational ideals. Thus, it is reasonable not only to compare this theory of education with other *theories* of education but also to reflect on this position in relation to other curricular policy positions. If read this way, the non-affirmative approach offers an alternative to the following contemporary educational ideologies or policy positions: They all feature specific views on educational aims, contents, and methods.[1]

Academic Factualism A longstanding tradition, but also recent initiatives in curriculum and didactics, as well as in education policy, argue in favour of solving the dilemmas of today's world with a stronger focus on increasing disciplinary knowledge rather than viewing our challenges as moral and political dilemmas. Such a content-based system favours teaching as the transmission of knowledge to students and typically downplays the learner's role. Non-affirmative education also values the learning of generally accepted and tested knowledge. By learning such knowledge, the subject may transcend his or her unique individual experience and way of understanding the world. Yet, to be meaningful from an *educational* perspective, the

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[1] Compare with the Chap. 15 by Armend Tahirslay in this volume.

learner needs support for critical reflection on such knowledge and how it is value-related, to establish its meaning. Non-affirmative theory views learning the contents as a means to develope the student's critical thinking. In this respect, in Bildung as a process, the learner reflexively embraces the culture while simultaneously being embraced by the culture. Non-affirmative theory reminds us of that learning and that this process is an unending one, whereby it becomes a continuous task for the subject. It is a position that offers a rare combination of stability and openness in the individual's relationship with herself, others, and the world.

Furthermore, so-called factual knowledge by itself does not provide any advice for action. We know that there is no direct path from knowledge to action. Knowing what something is, we cannot conclude what it should be in the future. In addition, although the rational reason may be helpful in moral issues, analytical thinking does not offer conclusive solutions. Such educational or *academic factualism,* promoting the learning of knowledge without discernment of its morals or personal meaning, represents a limited, rationalist, idea of the individual as a self-determined subject. Such an approach to Bildung also reminds us of the traditional 'material' approach to Didaktik, often prevalent in subject matter didactics. Unfortunatly, the ongoing psychologisation of education as an academic discipline supports this rationalist ideal of learning. After all, much educational psychology limits its focus to the attainment of (learning) conceptual knowledge, but psychological approaches often lack theoretical tools to discuss how selected content would be educative in nature.

While Bildung-centred non-affirmative education theory is aware of the value dimensions of knowledge, it also reminds us of the importance of maintaining a difference between opinions and knowledge, doxa and epistéme. In a world of opinions on social media, learning to reason rationally by following established ideas of truthful knowledge is crucial. However, this is not a good argument for defending academic factualism as a curricular principle.

Educational Performativism and Competencism A second contemporary orientation in curriculum policymaking is content with promoting performative competencies. This position, *educational performativism and competencism,* argues that it is sufficient if individuals can *perform* the tasks needed in, for example, working life. For this, the individual needs to acquire certain competencies. With such arguments, authorities in many places expect, for example, higher education institutions to validate competencies achieved in 'real life'. Such policies clearly downplay the worth of conceptual or theoretical knowledge and reasoning, which offer necessary conceptual insights making visible the unvisible dimensin of practical matters at hand. In addition to its normative foundations, educational performativism and competencism, driven by technical, instrumental, and social efficiency, typically aim to increase economic effectiveness. As an educational ideal, this orientation diminishes the subjects' ability to reach self-determination in a broader sense. A different version of practice-oriented curriculum policy corresponds with research on situated cognition and legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice. This direction might deserve the title of educational contextualism.

Educational Activism A third developmental line in curriculum work is the familiar idea of subordinating education to political and religious interests and ideologies. We call this position *educational activism*, in which the values promoted by education are unquestioned and self-evident—for the proponents. The pedagogical challenge is limited to the transformation or reconstruction of society by (a) transferring predetermined practices and experiences or (b) implementing new ideals for the future. An example of the first is a contemporary neo-conservative 'cultural canon' movement. In an increasingly multicultural world, curriculum policy based on a 'cultural canon' defines the core features of what it is to be an 'educated' or qualified member of a society or nation. An example of the second position is limiting education to allow the growing generation to dream but only a given, predetermined dream. In both cases, education operates instrumentally to promote external interests. The utopian version of educational moralism emphasises social, cultural, and political agency but strives to promote predetermined values to be carried out by future activists. Activist pedagogy often operates in the interests of politicised education policy, which differs from non-affirmative political citizenship education (Politische Bildung). While democratic polities defend their obvious right to establish curricular norms *politically* to guide education, these policies, especially multiparty-oriented governments, typically understand that sufficient room must be reserved for *pedagogical* critique and debate of the interests promoted. Therefore, the non-affirmative theory argues that if the space necessary for the subject's own will formation is sacrificed, education in such systems may become counterproductive, not only for democratic life but also for otherwise dynamic culture and economy.

Educational Technologism Finally, recent developments in artificial intelligence and robotics, combined with the global pandemic, have once again turned attention to the constantly recurrent focus on *teaching methods* and media. Without a doubt new technology has provided promising and previously unseen possibilities to offer and organise education if we only recognise the risks associated with overemphasising these possibilities. From history, we are familiar with the hope connected to the instructional method. Since Comenius, we have been familiar with the idea of 'teaching all things to all men' by a universal *method*. We call such a position *educational technology*. Recent technological developments require a serious rethinking of, for example, the social character of human teaching and learning, as well as a rethinking of the extent to which advanced intelligent systems, may support pedagogical processes. However, this *method* is only single-dimensional. In a fragmented educational research culture, there is a risk that this research direction will come to live a life of its own. A related reductionist position consists of initiatives to consider communication theory as the foundation of didactics.

A non-affirmative approach to education and Bildung views the previous four policy tendencies as one-eyed. First, each perspective typically perceives itself as superordinate to the others. Second, not acknowledging the dynamics between the topics raised by balancing and questioning each against the ambitions of another

dramatically reduces the subject's possibilities to develop towards self-determination and a reflected will. These educational aims correspond with understanding societal practices as non-hierarchical and the future as non-teleological.

The non-affirmative theory provides us with a reflected language not only for understanding the task of education, becoming human, being human, and transformations as humans but also for empirical research regarding the extent to which education (e.g. for self-determination and co-determination) is possible to practise within a given policy system. In extension, non-affirmative education theory offers an analytical lens for working with curriculum development and policy. Operating with this lens recommends us to view the notions of *recognition* and *affirmation* as distinct from each other. Schools need to *recognise* curricular aims and content, but to what extent are they allowed not to affirm these aims and contents with pedagogical motives? To *affirm* them would mean not to problematise these aims and contents *with* students, thereby risking reducing education to naïve transmission of given values and contents. Not affirming these aims and contents does not mean denying their truth or relevance but working with them to create a *pedagogical space* for the student or pupil. These pedagogical spaces allow for critical reflection on the meaning and value of phenomena. These constructed spaces are invitations for discerning thought and experimental practice, asking how knowledge relates to value and how given knowledge may solve urgent problems in society, but also reflecting on whose interest knowledge is developed. Non-affirmative educational teaching is a way to promote and reflect on such reflective and experimental pedagogical spaces. Embracing a non-teleological view where the shape of the future depends on how we, and future generations, act ourselves is an education of hope but also an education that emphasises ethical awareness and responsibility in many different ways. A fresh take on non-affirmative theory offers us a language of education coherent with critical humanism connected with a cosmopolitan gaze, the approach conceptualises a recognition-aware and multi-generational but non-affirmative understanding of sustainable education.

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