

# **An Analysis of Aims and the Educational “Event”**

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## **Abstract**

In this article, the author explores key distinctions relevant to aims talk in education. He argues that present formulations of aims fail to adequately capture or speak to several overlapping domains involved in schooling: qualification, socialization, and the educational in the form of subjectification (Biesta, 2010). Drawing off Egan and Biesta to differentiate the educational domain, the author details an ontological orientation to the educational “event” through the work of Badiou while grounding this exploration in ancient Western distinctions between sophistic and Socratic approaches to education as detailed by Bartlett. The article ends with a call for non-Indigenous educators to expand Canadian conceptions of educational aims and citizenship through Indigenous orientations to these vital education terms.

*Keywords:* objectives, Badiou, Biesta, Socrates, citizenship education, social studies, curriculum

## **Résumé**

Dans cet article, l’auteur explore des distinctions clés à établir lorsqu’on parle de buts en éducation. Il avance que les formulations actuelles des buts ne prennent pas en compte

adéquatement les divers domaines qui se recoupent en éducation : la qualification, la socialisation et la subjectivisation (Biesta, 2010). Puisant dans Egan et Biesta afin de différencier le domaine éducatif, l’auteur décrit une orientation ontologique quant à l’« événement » éducatif à travers l’œuvre de Badiou tout en fondant cette exploration sur les anciennes distinctions occidentales entre les approches pédagogiques sophiste et socratique telles qu’ont été présentées par Bartlett. L’auteur termine en s’adressant aux éducateurs autochtones : il souhaite qu’ils élargissent les conceptions canadiennes des buts en éducation et de la citoyenneté en y intégrant leurs visions autochtones de ces volets clés de l’éducation.

*Mots-clés* : buts, Badiou, Biesta, Socrate, éducation à la citoyenneté, sciences humaines, curriculum

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## Introduction

In a recent article, Stephen Thornton and Keith Barton (2010) review the range of aims offered by history and social studies educators throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century to justify a place for their subjects in the U.S. public school curriculum. In regards to such aims, they conclude that both educators of history and social studies should stand together to face a common adversary: those who promote either subject as an induction into nationalistic patriotic pride. The other aim they offer as a more palatable alternative is democratic citizenship. These options, however, do not adequately account for what is at stake in the question of educational aims in contemporary times.

As explored here, socialization and sophistry are two nouns that accurately name the dominant vision of education today. These stand in contrast not to citizenship or patriotism, or other related aims such as disciplinary induction, competencies, or values, but to the always-present potentiality of a Socratic form of the *educational*. Whereas sophistry and socialization aim to empower students into an existing order of opinion, the educational begins precisely where such orders break down to instigate a “truth procedure” inaugurated by an “event” (Badiou, 2001):

As with anything that constitutes an event, worlds are turned upside down, neuroses engendered, terrible beauties are born and education departments are forced to confront something that they are professionally required to find incomprehensible, namely, the desire to be educated, as something over and above the development of a specialist-knowledge, vocational competence, or the vague promotion of currently venerated “values.” (Cooke, 2013, p. 3)

To explore this framing of aims applicable to a host of subject areas—the educational inaugurated by an event in contrast to the scriptable learning required by socialization—I examine the work of Kieran Egan, Gert Biesta, Alain Badiou, and A. J. Bartlett to trace out a case for the claim that “the only education is an education by truths” (Badiou, 2005, p. 9). If by truths, then the curricular question is less “what knowledge is of most worth?” (that everyone in a political jurisdiction supposedly needs to know) and more “how might the forms of knowledge be arranged for the possible inauguration of a ‘truth process?’” (Badiou, 2001). Such a question asks that we better balance schooling’s *socialization* function with its *educational* potential that lies within people’s ever-present

capacity for “becoming subjects” to their learning and lives (Badiou, 2001). To make this distinction requires examining “the very stratum of presuppositions underlying curriculum aims, programming, or enactment” in the Euro-American tradition (Deng & Luke, 2008, p. 66). I end this piece with a call for non-Indigenous educators to attend more closely to what we might learn about the *educational* from North American Indigenous traditions.

## **A Brief Review of Aims**

Thornton and Barton (2010) trace several historical and contemporary educational movements in order to highlight two key dichotomies they see in social education today: a celebratory national (i.e., U.S.) story encouraging patriotism versus the “progressive” interpretations of citizenship as a lived experience, and inter-disciplinary orientations to social studies versus those who advocate initiating the young into discipline-specific reasoning procedures (for a concise argument in favour of this aim across disciplines, see Gardner, 1999). As to this latter tension, advocates have long shared a concern for preparing citizens:

Even before the term social studies originated in the early 20th century, attempts to specify content for the history curriculum had rested in broader conceptions of the subject’s role in preparing active and thoughtful citizens.... [T]hese efforts—led by historians—explicitly rejected patriotism and nationalism and extolled the role of history in preparing citizens. (Thornton & Barton, 2010, p. 2482)

While a range of responses exists in the social studies literature to the question of what is worth knowing, what ties these viewpoints together for Thornton and Barton (2010) “is their adherence to the democratic norms for which they hope to prepare students” (p. 2489). In general support of these norms, they assert that there are substantive propositions all should be able to get behind:

These include, at a minimum, the following: That students should learn how the social world operates, in all its complexity and variety—now and then, near and far; that students should engage with multiple perspectives, both the variety of viewpoints that existed within a given historical period and the range of ways in

which history is used and interpreted today; and that students should learn about the process of inquiry—asking questions, evaluating evidence, and drawing conclusions—so that they understand how knowledge of the social world is constructed. (Thornton & Barton, 2010, p. 2491)

The authors offer a convincing argument as to the shared historical appeals by history and social studies educators to the aim of democratic citizenship. I also find their minimum propositions attractive, but, and importantly, as means and not end. We might better consider each of their identified aims and their conclusion about minimal agreements as two exercises in socialization, tied to an idealization of inquiry, citizenship, and the nation-state they hope to prepare citizens to serve (see Tupper & Cappello, 2012, for examples of young people’s consumption of such idealizations). This becomes evident when we ask the question largely missing in contemporary aims talk towards which we might take vivifying aim, “what is educational about education?” (see Biesta & Safstrom, 2011, p. 544).

### **Key Distinctions: Socialization and Education**

For Egan (1983a), education’s most worthy aim lies in its potential to expand the human imagination beyond both the present and any present issue of concern (e.g., social justice, citizenship). Any discipline becomes un-educational when it serves an interest outside itself or its imaginative generating possibilities: “Their educational value is precisely what is eroded when they become handmaidens to the socializing purpose that pervades social studies” (Egan, 1983a, p. 208).

Egan (1983a) sees “democratic citizenship” as a prime example of a non-educational aim. To justify a curriculum based on preparing citizens is to “substitute pedagogy for experience”:

The skills of a democratic citizen are learned not from books or trendy techniques but by feeling the value of consideration for others, of accepting certain responsibilities, and so on, in the institutions of which the child is a member... If one wants to inculcate the virtues of democratic social life, one organizes one’s

family, one’s school, and one’s society to exemplify those virtues. (Egan, 1983a, p. 209–210; see also Biesta, 2007)

In support of education, Egan (1983a) explores the need to engage students in the thoughts, productions, and disciplinary frames necessary to view their experience or culture from a vivifying aesthetic, intellectual, and perhaps spiritual sense of historical proportion. To do so expands schooling’s dominant *socialization* function to embrace its *educational* aspect. How does he distinguish between the two?

Anything which may reasonably be called socializing has implicit in it the impulse and tendency to make people more alike, and the contrasting impulse and tendency in education is to make people more distinct. (Egan, 1983b, p. 27)

We can note this difference most clearly in reference to schools:

Those activities which are engaged in so that people can get on more easily in society at large—can get jobs, can fulfill the basic responsibilities of citizenship, parenthood, and so on—will tend to be mainly matters of socialization. Those activities which lead to personal cultivation will tend to be mainly educational. Socializing activities are justified on the grounds of social utility; educational activities on the grounds of cultivation of individuals. (Egan, 1983b, p. 31)

This is a productively provocative distinction.

Read through Egan (1983b), both aims identified by Thornton and Barton—between patriotism and democratic citizenship—might be better understood as two shades of the same palette: socialization at the expense of the educational. Patriotism seeks to socialize students into a particular paternalistic imagined community of the nation (and racist, see Stanley, 2006; epistemologically divisive, see Donald, 2009; colonial, see Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013) to assuage adult concerns of one or another sort (e.g., kids don’t love or know enough about the key developments of their country’s past; we are not internationally economically competitive because teachers are straying off script [Pinar, 2004]). Schooling for democratic citizenship seeks to also socialize students into an imagined community of democratically oriented critical or disciplinary inquirers, or to offer students alternative sets of characters, events, and movements than its supposed adversary. In each case, the question of what is educational in education is deferred,

justified in terms that have less to do with what aims we might seek in the educational encounter itself and more to do with a logic of, and desire for, a social aim outside the educational.

### **Further Distinctions: Qualification, Socialization, and the Educational**

Biesta (2010) more recently takes up the distinction between socialization and the educational. The question of aims is a "composite question" that necessitates attention to three overlapping schooling domains to which aims point: schooling as "qualification, socialization, and subjectification" (Biesta, 2010, p. 20).

In addition to the certification of capabilities to do something (e.g., plumbing, some basic knowledge of textbook versions of official political rule), qualification also refers to that deemed necessary to participate in collective life. Here, qualification overlaps with schooling's socialization function referencing "the many ways we become part of a particular social, cultural, and political 'orders'" (Biesta, 2010, p. 20). These orders include the "hidden curriculum" regarding expected but implicit language codes, bodily schedules, and mental routines. They also include those more intentional aims such as "the continuation of particular cultural or religious traditions, or for the purpose of professional socialization" (p. 20).

Biesta's (2010) concern lies with subjectification for two reasons. As he details, the question of what is educational about education is largely absent in mainstream Euro-American discussions about public education, and, subjectification constitutes a compelling response to the question:

I take the position that subjectification should be an intrinsic element of all education worthy of the name... It is...a normative statement expressing the belief that education becomes uneducational if it only focuses on socialization—i.e., on the insertion of "newcomers" into existing sociocultural and political orders—and has no interest in the ways in which newcomers can, in some way, gain independence from such orders as well. (Biesta, 2010, p. 210)

Subjectification, he argues, begins in the "excess" present in a teaching situation (Biesta & Safstrom, 2011; for a nuanced exploration of the presence of such excess in a teaching encounter, see Aoki, 1993). What makes an activity educational lies in its "particular

interest in freedom”—a freedom (as I interpret) to not only *learn a subject* but to *become a subject*. Let me turn to unpack this notion of freedom as subjectification as an educational aim.

Biesta’s (2010) work seeks to avoid both freedom’s European Enlightenment and contemporary social justice sets of affective resonances. Specifically, he wants to attend to the atemporal ground between the “what is” and “what is not (yet)”:

There is a danger that in such notions as emancipation, enlightenment, liberation and empowerment freedom is always projected into the future, as something that needs time, as something that may arrive, but that is always to arrive later. (Biesta & Safstrom, 2011, p. 543; see also Bowers, 1984)

Distinct from classical Euro-American formulations of humanism, freedom is not an individual possession or set of qualities. Rather, following Arendt, Biesta explores freedom as a subjectification, as a “coming into presence”; an emergent fact-in-the-making. Agents continuously rearticulate their actions in conjunction with the actions of others that constitute the political realm: “Our freedom and subjectivity are therefore not to be found outside of the web of plurality; they only exist within it” (Biesta, 2010, pp. 84–85).

Within this plurality of relations that provide the very ground of presence, “uniqueness,” as a second movement in freedom, is called upon when it matters “that *I* am there and not just anyone” (Levinas, cited in Biesta, 2010, p. 86). Here, a distinction between “uniqueness as difference” and “uniqueness as irreplaceability” becomes germane.

“Uniqueness as difference” presents a risk of others becoming mere tools to distinguish comparative difference as one seeks to identify those qualities one possesses but another supposedly does not.<sup>1</sup> The notion of irreplaceability, on the other hand, draws the coordinates of uniqueness differently. This freedom to craft begins when one’s membership in a “rational community” and competency with its inherited social scripts fail:

We expect from doctors, electricians, airline pilots and so on [e.g., historians, scientists and teachers] that they speak according to the rules and principles of

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<sup>1</sup> Much more than a risk, as the colonial historical record documents; for an exploration of this orientation as the ground of Euro-American humanism, see Radhakrishnan (2006).



the rational discourse of the community of which they are a representative. This means, however, that the thing that matters when they speak is *what* is said. But *how* it is said and, more importantly, *who* is saying it is immaterial as long as what is said (and done) "makes sense" ... When we speak in this capacity we are therefore, interchangeable. This, in turn, means that our uniqueness does not count and is not at stake. (Biesta, 2010, p. 87)

In their qualification and socialization functions, schooling aims to help students become skilled with the many scripts-representative voices related to social, cultural, and disciplinary rational communities.

Lingis (1994) offers two limit cases to illustrate when we are called to attend to uniqueness as irreplaceability, and hence the sort of freedom that is educational: speaking with someone who is dying, and a mother with her child before the child enters a shared rational language community. In each case, as Biesta (2010) summarizes, our uniqueness as irreplaceability is called forth:

Anything one says sounds, in a sense, vacuous or even absurd. But the point of speaking in such situations is not primarily about what you say. What matters first and foremost in such situations is *that* you say something and, more importantly, that *you* say something. The situation is one that does an appeal to *you* to be there, and the very thing you cannot do in this situation is just walk away and send someone else into replace you. You are "singled out" so to speak, and it is therefore up to *you* to respond, to invent a unique response, to speak in your own, unique voice, rather than as a representative voice. (p. 88)

We might say that learning that is educational (in contrast to learning that is socialization) begins precisely where the socialization into rational communities proves inadequate. In such gaps, we are invoked or convoked to a response-ability that constitutes irreplaceability.

Biesta's (2010) thinking here also extends the "what is" (e.g., democratic citizenship) and "what is not (yet)" (e.g., social justice) poles that Egan (1983b) sought to distinguish and that Egan argues socialize but do not educate. The educational is found in subjectification as a kind of freedom that is "becoming a subject of action and responsibility" (Biesta, cited in Saeverot, 2013, p. 182). This moment of bringing something new

into the world should not be understood, however, and in contrast to Egan, as an individual capacity. Rather, “action,” as Arendt (1998) details, emerges only in conjunction with the responses and interventions of others (pp. 7–9, 198). This is the empirical case in how we learn to become conversant with those scripts inherited from “rational communities.” So too is it the case, as readers can confirm with their own encounters, where and when those scripts fail or become inadequate to the task of having to respond to the presence of another and in a situation, at least originally, not of one’s own making.<sup>2</sup>

I turn now to contextualize key distinctions reviewed thus far by exploring the educational “event” as most recently taken up by Alain Badiou (2001, 2005), and whose work A.J. Bartlett (2011) employs to provide a fresh reading of the distinct Sophist–Socratic approaches to education. Applying Badiou’s work to education, we find a most rigorous articulation of those educational moments of “excess,” in which we might begin to enact “freedom as subjectification” in the event, becoming the subject-truth-procedures triad. I start, however, at the contemporary scene of teacher education to briefly contextualize why I see the question of the educational in aims talk as so crucial.

### **“I just wanted to know what I needed to know: I didn’t want to have to think about it”**

So spoke an excellent B.Ed student I once taught, describing her success as a high school student. She was responding to my question to the class asking what we could learn about learning to teach by re-examining what and how we had learned as successful K–12 students. When pressed about what we might glean from her statement, she responded, “Yes, but Kent, if we have students think all day, when will we get anything done?” The chance to encounter such insight at the heart of contemporary schooling—perhaps between “thinking” and getting “anything done” or between subjectification and qualification and socialization—gives teaching its vivifying quality.

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2 A necessity to explore the inadequacy of inherited scripts to provide guidance in the face of initially inexplicable historical events guides the less cited work in history education from Ivan Illich (1989) to Roger Simon (2005). For more recent work exploring the tensions between undertaking socialization versus the educational possibilities explored in curriculum theory, see Malewski’s (2013) poignant response to a fine version of the case for the disciplinary orientation in Stemhagen, Reich, and Muth (2013).

As successful students seeking a return to K–12 settings, education students offer sharp insights into dominant understandings of learning, knowledge, and knowing in contemporary education. After all, these students succeeded well enough in such a system to have “made the grade” into teacher education. As to making the grade, Segall and Gaudelli (2007) make a poignant reflection upon their years working in several U.S. teacher preparation programs:

What most often took place was a “performance of learning” rather than learning. Put otherwise, there was learning that did not get implicated and students who did not implicate themselves or their practicum environments in that learning. (p. 79)

They offer an explanation to account for this situation: many of their education students come to their courses habituated as consumers of theory and practice, rather than generators of such.<sup>3</sup>

As consumers rather than producers, a lack of successful students’ implication in their learning is widespread. A teacher educator involved with me in another study in Western Canada takes up the issue directly with her students:

I try and have them [education students] dig under why is it that they’re so confused and frustrated with the fact that I don’t just tell them what and how to do things. Why does that cause confusion for them, or irritation, or even anger? (den Heyer, 2009a, p. 350)

This question presumes that students do not lack knowledge or skills to teach. In fact, they have learned much already about how to qualify to do so. Rather, they lack an educative opportunity to re-source what they have learned (and to desire) so as to inform their future practice (e.g., what are the expectations and their sources that, when not met, cause such somewhat predictable reactions?). Teachers and students might, for example, examine our mainstream acquisition culture’s decaying capacity to imagine any other aim

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3 It may often be the case that school success in fact requires that one not implicate or care too deeply about the content one is meant to acquire. After all, to implicate or to care creates unpredictable complications and thus potentially disrupts the scheduled time required to both acquire and demonstrate that acquisition through evaluation. Here, we encounter the core of the sophist education. Learn, but, just enough; care about my teaching but do not care too much about what is taught; be a person of multiple perspectives and commit to nothing.

than the sophistic and its vulgar form of pragmatism ... "just tell me what I need to know, I don't want to have to think about it."

## **Sophists and Socrates**

We can better interpret this vignette and the work of Egan and Biesta to distinguish between socialization and the educational by recalling ancient Euro-American distinctions between sophistic and Socratic versions of education. For the former, education consisted of instruction into the skills of appearing wise so as to acquire wealth and status within an inherited state of things. For Plato's Socrates, education was, in contrast, a recollection of what was already known, bringing such into the light of re-evaluation and re-working so as to embody a life of inquiry, a life of action and beginnings.

As Plato recounts, Socrates was an Athenian war hero without property who wandered about the city engaging all who sought understanding. He charged nothing for what may be learned as, he claimed, he had nothing to sell. This indeed confused many, for it was well known that the Oracle of Delphi had pronounced Socrates to be the wisest Greek alive. Socrates, however, premised his method of questioning on an axiom of equality: that both he and his interlocutors possessed equal capacity for "recollection" of what they already knew but had not adequately re-recognized (Felman, 1982). Therefore, each needed the other to possibly encounter that "gap" or disjuncture (i.e., lacuna, aporia) between what one thinks, one thought, and what one can claim to know. What might be learned from Socrates was how to take up a wise relationship to knowing and knowledge.

The sophists, in contrast, sold knowledge and the appearance of knowing required by fashion and contested by rival schools of thought to be necessary for the exclusively male citizens to make their way in the Athenian state of things:

Education is seen as the proper pursuit of the individual subject's interest in accord with the rule of the state... To know, in short, is to be properly instructed in an interest in interest [whereby] one's knowledge will translate into better wealth and one's wealth into better knowledge. (Bartlett, 2011, p. 52)

For the sophist, what is most worth knowing is that which serves the persona of appearances, self-interest, or reinforces desires to be productively useful in and to the state.

In a sophist approach, students do not *inquire* as much as *acquire* “qualification” and “socialization” through their master’s seal of reputation by imitating the master’s version of right opinion and conduct (“just tell me what I need to know...”, “when will we get *anything* done?”). What was unknown—that which could not be counted by the sophist or state’s system of accounting—was to be ignored or dispelled as unproductive nonsense. Bartlett (2011) offers a most succinct set of distinctions between sophistry and a Socratic form of education: “The sophist, concerning the truth, must be a man of perspective rather than conviction, of judgment rather than thought, of interest and not principle” (p. 61).

Socrates enacted education as an inquiry consisting of “truth seeking, truth dwelling, and truth sharing” (Smith, 2000, p. 17). Then as now, truths refer not to a property, thing, or final answer, but the material remainder of thought, words, art, love, or equations born from our taking up a relational stance amongst the “known-void-not yet known.” Here, I turn to a leading theoretician of the “void,” truth, and subjectivity today, Alain Badiou.

For those thinking of education through Badiou (den Heyer, 2009b, 2011; Bartlett, 2011), an ontological orientation to subjectivity has vital implications for aims talk in education. While he never addresses the subject in detail, Badiou (2005) suggests that education, in its most honorific sense, has never meant more than this: “to arrange the forms of knowledge in such a way that some truth may come to pierce a hole in them” (p. 9). As such, Badiou’s interpretation of the “void-event becoming subject via a truth procedure” describes well the Socratic form of the educational.

***The one is a (k)not.*** Badiou (2005, 2006) makes several key moves to rehabilitate contemporary interpretations of “truths” aiding thought about educational events. First, he situates philosophy in a supporting role to ontology, derived from his interpretation of mathematical set theory. Mathematics is ontology for Badiou. Or, more accurately, mathematical set theory provides a precise mapping to think of ontology and our contemporary configuration as symbolically represented beings, making our way according to those identities and beliefs required by the situation in which we have been socialized (or have been set up). This constitutes a significant difference in approaches to ontology between Badiou’s work and others (for example, differences between Badiou and Bahktin, and between Badiou and Heidegger). In contrast to mother tongues, mathematics has the virtue of describing being qua being without the drippy multiple of

meanings—whether as romantic resonances or unfilled presences—that any one word has in relation to another. Through set theory, Badiou axiomatically claims that, ontologically, there is no “one” or “One”: “for the one is not.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, any humanly affirmative ethic, or, as I argue, educational aim, cannot be founded on an ontological set-up of any “one” nation to which we must be patriotic, or “one” democratic vision into which educators socialize their youth. Rather, Badiou asks that we think about being and becoming in relation to the “without-one” that is the Lacanian “void” at the heart of all situations: “The multiple ‘without-one’—every multiple being in its turn nothing other than a multiple of multiples—is the law of being. The only stopping point is the void” (Badiou, 2001, p. 25).

The “void” lies at the heart of all knowledge claims; that at any given and unpredictable moment one may encounter a person, a thought, a question, that causes an “event” utterly voiding the legitimacy of what we just had thought or desired about ourselves or anything in particular (e.g., how falling in love shatters everything we thought about “our” situation as an any-“one” minding our own business before the “event” of “falling” in love). Set theory accounts for this fact of the void by the variously named null, empty, or generic set included, as a foundational axiom, in every constructed set.<sup>5</sup>

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4 Mathematically, an axiom is a proposition for which no proofs are required. An axiomatic statement begins a study of its consequences. Badiou’s use of set theory as a means to map ontological reality is likewise vigorously contested, see Nirenberg and Nirenberg (2011) and response to their critique by Bartlett and Clemons (2012).

5 Set theory is the theory of sets or configurations of numbers, objects, or in Badiou’s terms, “elements” (“characteristics” might be a more comprehensible and approximate term for “elements” for readers). Set theory is a hotly contested area of mathematics. In fact, and apropos, set theory is an area of inquiry itself comprised of many subsets. What Badiou takes from the set of set theories concern their ontological implications. Among others, he pays attention to the null or empty set; or again, in Badiou’s term, the generic set—generic because, having no specified elements (or characteristics) itself, it is taken to be part of all sets while, simultaneously, belonging to none exclusively. As an axiom upon which set theories proceed, all sets, whatever their configuration, contain the variously named null, empty, or generic set.

The presence of a generic set in every configured set determines that as many infinite differences exist within a given set as exists between that and any other set or sets. For example, imagine a roomful of objects. Regardless of by what elements-characteristics we arrange or configure a set of these objects, each set thus configured will have as many other possible sets of elements-characteristics within itself as that larger set from which it was set apart.

We could make a set of these objects according to “elements” of those with legs and those without, reconfigure from this set another consisting of objects with this or that colour, or another set of those to the left or right of this or that other object and so on...endlessly. Each set configured includes the generic set necessary to account for this fact of infinitely possible alternative settings within in any presumed one.

A set through which self-social knowledge and relations are configured is for Badiou the “situation”; concentrically overlapping social settings or territories through which, by naming some but not other

Like love as an event, we are confronted with the question and task of "fidelity" which is where, for Badiou (2001), the question of ethics, and I argue, the educational, begins: "A crisis of fidelity is always what puts to the test, following the collapse of an image, the sole maxim of consistency (and thus ethics): Keep going!":

There is always only one question in the ethic of truths: how will I, as some-one, continue to exceed my own being? How will I link the things I know, in a consistent fashion, via the effects of being seized by the not-known? (Badiou, 2001, p. 50)

In this process, a becoming subject embodies a "disinterested interest" in inherited opinions, and attempts to articulate what exceeds identification, concern for status, or self-interest:

All my capacity for interest, which is my own perseverance in being, has poured out into the future consequences of the solution to this scientific problem, into the examination of the world in the light of love's being-two, into what I will make of my encounter, one night, with the eternal Hamlet, or into the next stage of the political process, once the gathering in front of the factory has dispersed. (Badiou, 2001, p. 50)

Set in motion by an event, a "becoming subject" is "someone is simultaneously himself... and in excess of himself" (Badiou, 2001, p. 45).

Here, in pursuit of that which is an interminable "excess of," a "becoming-subject" seeks to name what will be absurd not to have believed, "making seem possible precisely that which, from within the situation, is declared to be impossible... an event-ality still suspended from its name" (Badiou, 2001, pp. 121, 126). The proper verb tense, therefore, with Badiou's event, truth procedure, and as I argue with Biesta (2010) in mind, the educational, is neither the present nor the past, but rather the future anterior.

By maintaining fidelity to articulating the implications of the event in a consistent fashion, a "becoming subject" declares "this will have been true," pursuing exactly "what

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elements-characteristics, we are subjected to an identity and opinions about the world. These range from family to State to economic relations where we learn to act, desire, and dream appropriately or identify ourselves as belonging to one but not another set (e.g., Canadians not Mexicans; black not white).

it will be absurd *not to have* believed" [italics added] (Gibson, 2006, p. 88) (e.g., Pluto is a planet one day, the next day not, "boys will be boys" seems at one time to justify actions deemed inexcusable by such logic at another, laws against miscegenation have sufficient support and, then, appear, for most, absurd). As with Biesta's (2010) use of Arendt's (1998) notion of "action," for Badiou, "beginnings will be measured by the re-beginnings they authorize" (cited in Bartlett, 2011, p. 118).

So, potentially, begins an education that is educational. Working out of a Badiou-ian framing of Socratic teachings "'is [to give] what you do not have to someone who does not want it,' in other words of giving the lack of knowledge (thus the very basis of all knowledge) to those who do not want it" (Bartlett, 2011, p. 57).<sup>6</sup>

Socrates was put on trial, charged with corrupting the youth through his teachings (in addition to charges of "impiety" for failing to acknowledge the gods that the city acknowledged). Strangely, Socrates never claimed to be a teacher or to have anything specifically to teach. What, Bartlett asks, does Socrates fail to do to the youth, what rule does he fail to satisfy?

The simple answer is of course that Socrates has no interest in this state of things... For this singular figure, what is in the interest of all is the very basis of all thought and discourse and not the contingent fabrication of a particular knowledge founded on excessive conceit and ignorant rule. (Bartlett, 2011, p. 53)

Socrates himself constituted a potential "void-event" whose presence voided the conceits of wisdom taught by the sophists. He, thereby, failed to subordinate students' capacities for truthful inquiry to the interests of "just the way that things are" or "just what they must become"; or, in Biesta's (2010) terms, neither "what is" nor "what is not (yet)." This greatly upset those whose points and professional positions necessitated, as Cooke notes above in my introduction, defining youth as lacking the ability to properly think or reason like adults: that they do not know enough, or lack essential dispositions or values that only the right kind of schooling can fix for the kind of citizenship required either by the state or schooling status quo.

***Our sophist present.*** In 2009, I published a review of chapters in the "Making Curriculum" section of the 2008 *Sage Handbook of Curriculum and Instruction* (den

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6 Here Bartlett cites Lacan's description of love and applies it to Socratic education.



Heyer, 2009c). In order to gain perspective on the four chapters of this section, I read these alongside various works of Alain Badiou as briefly reviewed above. What quickly became evident were two contrasting orientations to the knowledge, truth, and politics behind two equally distinct interpretations of the relevance of various actors and sites involved in the making and living of curriculum.

The authors in these *Handbook* essays detail the corporate negotiations of curriculum as a formal program of studies between sociologically defined groups and political movements (Apple, 2008), professionally interested groups struggling over the form of subject matter (Deng & Luke, 2008), politically motivated public representatives (Levin, 2008), and all the above (Westbury, 2008). While those familiar with these scholars’ work may place them on different points of an ideological spectrum, they share remarkably similar presuppositions about truth, knowledge, and the politics behind the official curricular task.

In their reviews of what they deem relevant research to the questions around making curriculum, these authors take up truth as being “reproduced from generation to generation” by specific “knowledge heritages” (Westbury, 2008, p. 48). The politics of curriculum making—politics interpreted as a question of “who gets what?” (Levin, 2008, p. 8; Apple, 2008)—involves each group struggling to have its forms of knowing or knowledge promulgated in the next formal curriculum text.

What we learn most poignantly from Westbury (2008), Levin (2008), and Apple (2008) about such negotiations would be unlikely to surprise readers of this journal. These essays detail the contemporary corporate negotiating behind curriculum making that proceeds under the sign “for the good of the child.” The givens are given—the good these agents imagine themselves serving and the Child who will then serve their goods—and negotiations proceed as a parley between interested units over the given. What stands out from these essays is an almost complete lack of “disinterested interest” at the table and in resulting curricula (Badiou, 2001). In short, the bargains these scholars document are born out of a profound cynicism about human potential for fidelity to events or subjectification notable at another time and in differing terms:

On the side of the machinery of school-work, I mention first the number of children in a room. This runs in the graded schools of our country anywhere from 35–60... Under such circumstances, how do we have the face to continue to speak

at all of the complete development of the individual as the supreme end of educational effort? (Dewey, 2001, p. 394)

Ben Levin (a former deputy minister of education in two Canadian provinces, Manitoba and Ontario) shares his insider's knowledge to detail our sophist present in regards to curriculum. Levin summarizes how we discuss the young in reference to curricular questions: "Political processes are driven by interests, and particularly by the most vocal interests. Finding ways to mediate interests through different processes and uses of evidence will remain a challenge, though one worth pursuing" (Levin, 2008, p. 22). As Levin further notes, "Even expert processes are susceptible to a preference for interest bargaining instead of evidence" (p. 19). As also confirmed by the other scholars in this handbook section, formal curriculum making is a "corporatist" negotiation over the abstracted Child, where even evidence serves self-interest (Saul, 1995).

John Ralston Saul (1995) asserts that the only views that count in a corporatist society do so because they express positions by representatives of a corporate entity (see "representative voice" above). In place of any democratic ideal requiring disinterested citizens seeking truths about what might become our common good, we have representatives of professional expert groups who accept the cover charge to be included in these debates: that is, speak only from corporate self-interest or, if required, in such vague homilies so as to constitute an abstract universalism without regard for lived realities or potentialities. Curriculum making as documented in these chapters should raise serious concerns that, rather like putting too many crackers in a bowl of soup, a social or educational situation whose knowledge of itself consists of self-interest will soak up and dehydrate any sense of common wealth, public purpose, or social encouragement to maintain fidelity to a truth procedure proceeding with a "disinterested interest."

What we find in these reviews should also raise concerns for a number of other issues taken up in this article, starting with the absence of questions that speak to *educational aims*, in contrast to the ubiquitous use of citizenship and other qualification and socialization rationales. Concerns are also raised regarding the denial of any "excess" in education that cannot be accounted for beforehand, and the sophistic deficit logic underpinning the self-interested negotiations detailed in these essays indicates the dearth of any language, any imagination, or perhaps any contemporary public capacity to speak for that which lies beyond sophistic self-interest.

## From Grid to Circle

To unlock the potential benefit of “aims talk” requires that we attend to the multiple domains that reflect the many contradictory demands placed on schools (Grumet, 1988; Labaree, 2012). As detailed by Thornton and Barton (2010), qualification and socialization constitute two worthy school domains toward which aims, such as preparation for democratic citizenship, point.<sup>7</sup> We of course cannot exist but without cultural inheritances to make sense of the world that begins with language.

Distinct from the aims of qualification and socialization, the educational constitutes another and largely ignored concern. It is to speak for this crucial aspect that non-Indigenous scholars would do well to engage a broader set of references. Before making this case, I briefly summarize my argument thus far.

Recall, that reading the educational event through Badiou necessitates first an ontological orientation to human situations, rather than constructing the school issue of learning primarily as an epistemological problem, the solution for which lies in getting our knowledge, techniques, or reasoning procedures finally right. From a Badiou-ian ontological orientation, we can map our inheritances as a set-up of identifications, assumptions, bodily dispositions, and orientations to knowledge and knowing. As Biesta (2010) details, it is through fluency with such that people become qualified and socialized into “rational communities,” understood both in terms of unrefined common sense and the more reified knowledge of the disciplines. From this ontological mapping, we can also account for an excess that inheres in every situation, potentially voiding what was once taken as “just the way it is,” and initiates the educational (e.g., *falling* in love; being seized by a social, artistic, or scientific quandary to which we must respond).

Our contemporary mainstream version of curriculum and “aims talk” reflect a sophistic orientation to the question of what is worth knowing: “Socrates opposes sophistry as the only kind of education recognizable to the state” (Bartlett, 2011, p. 37). This is a kind of education marked, first, by what Bartlett calls the sophistic *end* (of preparing the youth with “skills” to make their way in the state), second by sophistic *practice* (which treats education as a commodity to be exchanged for other goods) and, finally, by

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<sup>7</sup> Often left unaddressed are questions about when that preparation will be actualized and questions about the idealism in such a formulation of assuming a “democracy” into which we are preparing the young: see Couture (1997), Dean (2009).

sophistical *theory*, “which is exemplified in the ‘democratic’ relativism of Protagoras’s maxim that ‘man is the measure of all things’” (Bartlett, 2011, p. 37).

The scholars in my bibliography thus far will likely be, for the most part, recognizable sources for those who work out of a mainstream Euro-American educational or philosophical tradition. There are, however, other traditions with well-developed insights regarding the overlapping domains of qualification, socialization, and the subjectification inaugurated, as explored here, via the educational event.

The wide range of North American Indigenous forms of education account for these overlapping domains. To take but one example, I turn to Osage scholar George E. Tinker and his description of his “event”:

The following example is an incident that occurred while I was making the rite of vigil (sometimes popularly called vision quest) about two decades ago. I still live out of the experience and still work to understand the event more fully. I was engaging in this ceremony largely for cultural and personal identity reasons. I had no expectation of really having a vision of any kind. For me the experience was to be one of intense prayer and physical endurance. I had decided to spend four days and four nights in this ceremony, in an isolated location in a very small half-dome lodge with no food and no water. My ancestors had done it. I felt a need to experience some sense of solidarity with them and with those Indian relatives who were still engaging in this ceremony. But a vision? I was too far gone for that, I assumed. Too much of a skeptic and too well-trained as an objective scholar. Moreover, this was not my first completion of this ceremony. I was already experienced and knew pretty much what to expect: hunger, thirst, unbearable heat in the daytime and cold at night. (Tinker, 2004, p. 116).

Tinker recounts four visits from a buffalo bull during his quest. As he describes the buffalo did not speak nor did he see the being, but heard it:

It is now more than two decades later, and I am still struggling to understand what occurred on that day. I am long past the temptation to deny that it happened or to try explaining it away, since I have had other experiences even more remarkable than this—and even less explicable to a “theology and the natural sciences” audience. (Tinker, 2004, p. 118)

We can note here a strong resonance to Badiou’s notion of an “events” future anterior orientation; what *will* the visit or event *have meant*? Note that, as with Badiou, there is no Western scientifically objective verification for Tinker that an event happened, only a becoming subject whose capacities for truth processes an event has activated and which will require a great deal of work to articulate what the event will have meant (some 20 years’ worth and more). This is education or the educational in its most honorific form. Also note that there is a socialization function (to join in experience with his ancestors) to qualify more deeply as a member of his group. Here, we can learn that qualification and socialization need not be sophistic, but that depends on aims desired and the ceremonies we construct in support of such. Nor is either opposed to the educational. Rather, a question that attends to each domain is needed: how might the forms of knowledge (those required for qualification and socialization) be arranged for the possibility of an event to occur and the educational inaugurated?

Finally, Tinker’s (2004) essay explores his tradition’s “socialization” in which humans, nation, citizenship, and what constitutes disciplined understanding all take on very different forms and forms of meaning when placed in their inter-relational co-dependency with non-human entities. This indeed may be a lesson more of us must heed. As Bowers makes the case, the fate of our ecological sustainability for human life depends on expanding the circle of mainstream talk about aims and citizenship. The alternative is to remain stuck in a “double bind”: that we will continue to sophistically think of aims tied to fantasized ideals of citizenship and nation-state that create the problems we then seek to fix with more of the same thinking (Bowers, 1987, 2010; Dean, 2009).

I humbly borrow Tinker’s story not to show how Badiou details so well an educational event across all cultural milieus. Instead, I want to point to rich possibilities we might accrue by putting into conversation one tradition with another to make good sense of the educational. In thinking about history as a subject (see Donald, 2009; Marker, 2011; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013) or education aims more generally (Akan, 1999; Littlebear, 2000) there is much to learn by challenging mainstream epistemological formations of the schooling-aims question. Doing so might expand the range of possible responses to Thornton and Barton’s call to help students investigate “...how the social world operates, in all its complexity and variety—now and then, near and far...”

This is an especially pertinent question here in Western Canada with the recent inclusion of “Aboriginal perspectives” in the official program of social studies. Are we

simply to add this perspective, however variously defined and taken up, to the qualification and socialization functions of citizenship tied to the nation-state? Or, must the terms change in the ways we might address the ontological presuppositions undergirding aims talk (e.g., conceptions of the nation, nationalism, patriotism)? Or, as D. T. Donald (2012) asks, “On whose terms will Aboriginal–Non Aboriginal perspectives meet” (n.p.) more generally (related to a host of long pressing issues) and more specifically, as explored here, as relates to the educational?

We would be ill advised if we did not heed our own calls for multiple perspectives and expand our bibliographies to account for the range of ways to “understand how knowledge of the social world is constructed” (Thornton & Barton, 2010, p. 2491). I hope the educational as taken up here offers a way to engage not only with multiple perspectives, but with convictions as signalled by Tinker. If not, it seems to me that we will continue to be stuck in a grid where a narrow and abstracted form of thinking about aims and citizenship tied to the nation-state, each of which we are repeatedly told will be actualized in promised wealth at an always soon-to-be-realized future time, is the best we sophists can propose.

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