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On Being Taught

Ada S. Jaarsma
Mount Royal University, adajaarsma@gmail.com

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On Being Taught

Abstract

This essay examines the definitions of the key words of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL)—scholarship, teaching, and learning—in order to identify the hopes that animate SoTL research and examine these hopes in light of recent critical thinking about the corporatization of higher education. Arguing that Biesta's (2013b) distinction between "learning from" and "being taught by" offers an important corrective to the prevailing definitions of SoTL, the essay reflects on the tensions between scholarly teaching, as understood by SoTL, and teaching as a contingent and unpredictable event.

Cet essai examine la définition des mots-clés de l'avancement des connaissances en enseignement et en apprentissage (ACEA) – avancement des connaissances, enseignement, apprentissage – afin d'identifier les espoirs qui inspirent la recherche en ACEA et d'examiner ces espoirs à la lumière des pensées critiques récentes qui portent sur la tendance de l'enseignement supérieur à fonctionner comme une entreprise. Cet essai présente l'argument selon lequel la distinction faite par Biesta (2013b) entre « apprendre de quelqu'un » et « être enseigné par quelqu'un » constitue une correction importante aux définitions actuelles de l'ACEA. L'essai propose une réflexion sur les tensions qui existent entre l'enseignement intellectuel, tel que compris par l'ACEA, et l'enseignement en tant qu'événement contingent et imprévisible.

Keywords

SoTL, critical theory, Gert Biesta, neoliberal, pedagogy, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Cover Page Footnote

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In 1990, Boyer published a report, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, that initiated the movement that is now known as the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). As president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Boyer (1990) identified a certain crisis in the academy that seemed in need of redress: namely, the devaluation of teaching, due in part to its separation from the kinds of scholarship that received more resources and rewards at universities. An aspect of faculty labour that was excised from competitive system of grants and peer review, teaching did not yield the legitimation that seemed necessary in order to promote excellence in the classroom. “After all,” Boyer (1990) commented in the preface to his report, “it’s futile to talk about improving the quality of teaching if, in the end, faculty are not given recognition for the time they spend with students” (p. xi).

Boyer’s (1990) suggestion was to expand the definition of scholarship to include teaching, explaining that this augmented definition would secure the recognition by others of the expertise required for effective teaching:

> The work of the professor becomes consequential only as it is understood by others. Yet, today, teaching is often viewed as a routine function, tacked on, something almost anyone can do. When defined as *scholarship*, however, teaching both educates and entices future scholars. (p. 23)[1]

This call for a commitment to scholarship that includes teaching led to the creation of SoTL, and as a phenomenon that is caught up in the contemporary corporatized university system, it seems worthy of critical reflection. After all, based on Brown’s (2015) recent analysis, SoTL began as a response to one of the symptoms of the neoliberalization of higher education (p. 196), namely the devaluation of undergraduate teaching. In this essay, I am interested in the hopes that underpin the apologetics for what Boyer calls scholarly teaching, as well as the implicit presumptions about teaching, learning and scholarship that guide the research that falls under the rubric of SoTL.

Scholarship, as defined by subsequent Carnegie president Shulman (1999), is the means by which teaching practices become public, become an object of critical review and evaluation, and become used, built upon and developed. If teaching is analogical to research, as the appeal to “scholarly teaching” suggests, then it promises to afford the kinds of rewards for faculty members that come from peer review as long as it is able to translate itself into the medium and methodology required for academic publication. These rewards include the evaluative input by other researchers into one’s methodology, data and conclusions, input that brings with it considerable subjective rewards such as affirmation, recognition and commendation. Since SoTL as a movement requires faculty members to decide to invest in scholarly teaching, the promise of subjectively rewarding benefits seems essential to its operative definition. SoTL is cast as distinct from the philosophy of education for precisely these reasons: it is inquiry conducted by disciplinary practitioners about context-specific problems involving teaching and learning in their own locations, often in their own classes (McKinney 2013). One can become an expert, as a teacher, in one’s own classroom through scholarly teaching.[2]

By assuming that the publication of the results of scholarly teaching will secure more robust value for teaching as such, Boyer and the subsequent community of SoTL practitioners stake certain claims upon the efficacy of the academic conventions of

adjudication and peer review. And the promise that value accrues to scholarly teaching extends to SoTL itself, which hinges its own professions of worth on the production of published research. Trigwell (2013) argues, for example, that evidence-based practices are needed to substantiate SoTL's efficacy, scholarly worth and practical effects. Its own self-understanding is at stake, we could say, in this vested interest in SoTL's substantiation as a set of respected research endeavours.

There is another aspect of SoTL's definition of scholarship, and this has to do with the assumptions about *which* methods are most likely to yield the rewards that are linked with scholarly teaching. Based on the work published under the rubric of SoTL, there is an implicit claim that scholarly research is empirical research. Descriptively speaking, for example, the preponderance of SoTL publications employ methods that are reflective more of the sciences and social sciences than the humanities.[3] Because of this over-representation of the sciences in SoTL, Chick (2013) points out that "there is an invisible norm in the field of SoTL that needs closer interrogation" (p. 18).[4] As her overview of SoTL journals, conferences, and leading texts demonstrates, this norm lines up with empirical methods: SoTL work tends to involve control groups, experimental design, statistical analysis and quantifiable results.[5] According to Grauerholz and Main (2013), SoTL methods appeal to thoroughly empiricist assumptions: that SoTL research makes use of control groups, that SoTL findings can be generalized across educational settings, that current assessment measures are adequate for measuring student learning, and that the pedagogical approaches put forward by SoTL researchers are superior.[6]

It is this latter claim that I would like to reflect on in more detail: the claim that SoTL pedagogy is legitimated as superior through empirical research. One of SoTL's aims is to improve student learning by studying how students learn the subject matter at hand (Sturges, 2013). There is a tendency for SoTL "to be interpreted as empirical inquiries into the relationship between instructional strategy and the students' learning of the material taught" (Kreber, 2013, p. 12b). The object of study itself, in other words, links the *how* of teaching with the *what* of learning. In its own development as a movement, overall, SoTL has shifted to incorporate more explicit emphases on "learning." When Schulman took on a leadership role in Carnegie in 1997, Boyer's emphasis on teaching shifted to an emphasis on learning. As Bender (2005) explains in her historical sketch of the SoTL movement, the new concerns for SoTL became oriented around how to secure evidence about *learning*, and the key research questions posed queries such as: "What works to make learning happen? What doesn't? How do we recognize and document learning when we see it" (p. 49)? Along similar lines, Hutchings and Huber (2008) write that SoTL is not an end in itself but a means to an end: "The purpose is to improve student learning" (p. 241).

And so, to sum up this overview of SoTL's key definitions, where "scholarship" aligns closely with empiricist assumptions about rigour and evidence and where "teaching" gains legitimation because of its transformation into scholarly teaching, along the terms asserted by Boyer (1990), "learning" is understood in and through the expectations that it will improve through the empirical methods of observation and measurement.

In the following section of this essay, I am interested in what seems like a slippage between the *what* of empirical research into learning and the *how* of teaching. As the preceding description suggests, one of the hopes that animates SoTL's guiding

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definitions is that SoTL demonstrates and leads to better teaching because it is able to track effective learning. Certainly, in terms of the subjective investment by faculty members to participate in SoTL, the promise of becoming a better teacher seems to offer one of the most, if not the most, motivating reasons to strive for scholarly teaching.

But does participating in SoTL and becoming knowledgeable about learning actually make you a better teacher? Does the *what* of evidence-based research into learning translate into the *how* of improved teaching? Does knowledge about "what works" in the classroom get appropriated into new and better practices? Sometimes these questions are smoothly elided by descriptions of SoTL. In her survey of key arguments in the development of SoTL, for example, Ochoa (2011) writes, "In teaching skillfully, practicing scholarly teaching, and then examining one's practices using the scholarship of teaching, one is improving practice and more importantly improving ways to promote student learning" (p. 113).[7] There are critical voices from within SoTL practice that identify the gap between knowing what and knowing how. Trigwell (2013), for example, points to a widely cited claim that the purpose of SoTL is to enhance university teaching but explains that there has not been substantial empirical evidence that teachers who engage with SoTL are improving students' learning. Along similar lines, Kreber (2001) describes one of the agreed-upon open questions in SoTL has to do with the links between expertise in teaching and expertise in the scholarship of teaching.

I suspect that the definitions that currently constitute the basis of SoTL research might exacerbate, rather than mitigate, this confusion between the *what* of knowledge and the *how* of practice. For example, if we focus in particular on the term learning, when SoTL seeks to produce better teaching by employing empiricist methods to track effective learning, what precisely marks the evidence of efficacious learning? Put more sharply, might the definition of learning, as mobilized by SoTL research, be over-determined in ways that elide the gap between knowledge and practice? And what is stake in such an evasion of this gap? The next section of the paper elaborates these questions and looks to a philosopher of education, Gert Biesta, for an alternative definition of learning, one that presents significant challenges as well as opportunities to SoTL.

Challenging SoTL's Key Definitions

Even from within an empiricist framework, it is problematic if one's object of inquiry is overly determined by the terms of a research project. A robust study must be able to discover new ideas, to correct errors and give rise to productive lines of inquiry, all outcomes that are impossible if the terms of research—like, for example, what constitutes evidence of learning—dictate the outcome ahead of time. If the terms of research are such that they elide self-reflection, then what passes for evidence might be better described as scientism than as scientific rigour. This is precisely the quandary that characterizes much educational research, according to recent critical assessments of the contemporary corporatized university. Hufford (2010) argues, for example, "Schooling today is effectively in the grips of a behaviorist psychology which in its attempts to bring scientism (not science) into education, minimizes—perhaps even challenges the existence of—the freely choosing individual" (p. 170).[8] Similarly, Biesta (2010, 2013a) diagnoses this paradigm in higher education as the "learnification" of educational discourse and

practice. According to Biesta, the shift in research from teaching to learning is not a neutral one, both because it eclipses a more important emphasis on teaching and because it falls squarely within the neoliberal transformation of education.[9] Since SoTL itself exemplifies this shift towards learning, it proffers a case study in critical thinking about the relations between scholarship, teaching and learning.

One of the characteristics of learnification is the turn towards corporatized imperatives in education. And from a critical standpoint, complicity with administrative prerogatives like accountability is not a neutral element in scholarly practice. Adjusting for inflation, tuition and fees have increased by $18,500 at average public research universities since 1988, and 40% of this increase is attributable to administrative costs.[10] Bauman (2012) explains that our current students occupy positions of precarity that we as professors need to recognize:

> For the first time in living memory, the *whole class of graduates* faces a high probability, almost the certainty, of ad hoc, temporary, insecure and part-time jobs, unpaid 'trainee' pseudo-jobs deceitfully rebranded 'practices'—all considerably below the skills they have acquired and eons below the level of their expectations. (p. 47)[11]

Complicity with the corporatization of education risks ignoring these exclusionary dynamics that affect graduating students so dramatically (see Côté & Allahar, 2011). The converse of complicity, then, involves scrutinizing the conditions of possibility for learning.

Rather than simply pointing to SoTL as an example of learnification, however, I would like to reflect on SoTL's self-understanding, as demonstrated by its key definitions, in order to think through the predicament of wanting to improve learning in the contemporary university. Based on Biesta's critical analysis of higher education, I would like to suggest that SoTL has, unwittingly, bound itself within ideological terms that both restrict rather than enhance its ability to interrogate the nature of teaching in the contemporary university and that undermine rather than cultivate its capacity for improving learning. The stakes are clearly high here, since it is the animating hopes of SoTL that are on the hook in this critique. The broader concern has to do with the fact that universities have become increasingly synced, in both policy and discourse, with the prescriptions of neoliberalism. If faculty members become less rather than more capable of critical thinking about such prescriptions, then their ambitions to become scholarly teachers actually contribute to the impoverishment of education.

SoTL is implicated in this critique in part because of its assumption that learning is what can be empirically measured through scholarly teaching. According to Servage (2009), this assumption aligns too smoothly with neoliberal dictates:

> assessment for learning and assessment for individual and institutional accountability are collapsed into one analytical category, such that only learning that is somehow quantifiable and of performative use value is legitimized as learning. In other words, only those forms of student learning that fulfill mandated outcomes (often engineered, directly or indirectly, by state and industry interests) are labeled successful 'learning.' (p. 35)

Biesta (2007) agrees that the growing emphasis on evidence-based practices syncs with neoliberal policies (see also Bender, 2005). On this account, SoTL's emphasis on securing evidence for "what works" in the classroom resonates directly with neoliberal demands of transparency and accountability. As a means for securing accountability in higher education, SoTL research reassures students, administrators and the public that educators are accountable for efficiency and efficacy. Bender (2005), for example, whose descriptions of the origins of the SoTL movement include phrases like "crusading" and "multi-leveled campaign of persuasion and infiltration" (p. 43), explains that SoTL emerged directly as a response to a growing public distrust of faculty members (p. 44). Along similar lines, McKinney (2013) notes SoTL's value for "program assessment, program review, and accreditation," providing "data to enhance institutional priorities" (p. 1).

If we return to the definition of learning at work within SoTL, we find that it links closely to the particular understanding of learning exemplified by the trend that Biesta (2005) indicts as "learnification." As mentioned above, SoTL has shifted towards a focus on learning.[12] Bender describes this shift towards learning as one towards "deep" learning in particular, an understanding of learning that educational theorists call "constructivism" (see also Verner & Lay, 2010). Educational theorists identify constructivism as the turn in higher education that lays claim to collaborative and cooperative problem-based learning.[13] Oriented towards personal experiential meaning for students, constructivist approaches to education strive for "deep" rather than "surface" learning and affirm student activity instead of top-down instruction.

And, from within the terms employed by SoTL practitioners, it does seem to be constructivist outcomes that are being measured when SoTL projects seek to determine whether or not teaching practices are effective. Reporting on his research into the efficacy of SoTL for good teaching, for example, Trigwell (2013) equates good teaching with deep learning, referring to "teaching that is associated with students' deep approaches to learning *and therefore to higher quality learning outcomes*" (p. 97, emphasis added). Trigwell's (2013) equation of good teaching with deep learning is highly representative of SoTL discourse. Good teaching on these terms includes "a search for meaning, relevance, application, and relations to other experience" (p. 98), teaching in which students are encouraged to question their own ideas and where teachers provoke discussion and monitor students' changing understanding.

What SoTL describes as "learning" is what Biesta (2013b) advocates calling "learning from." Biesta (2013b) explains that

> when they *learn from* their teachers, they bring their teachers and what their teachers do or say within their own circle of understanding, within their own construction. This means that they are basically in control of what they learn from their teachers. (pp. 456-457, emphasis added)

This suggestion that we should qualify learning as learning *from* stems out of Biesta's (2013b) claim that the shift towards constructivism is ultimately an ideological one (p. 453). "Learning from," on his terms, corresponds to constructivist approaches to the classroom in which students too easily become satisfied consumers (p. 460). As

consumers, students need not confront difficult or inconvenient knowledge, since they are hailed as already in possession of whatever insights are required in order to become educated.

The constructivist turn thus reduces the teacher to a facilitator, limited to teaching the student what she or he already knows.[14] By employing constructivist practices with a focus on student capacities, Biesta (2013b) warns that "learning from" risks eliding from attention the actual object of study, namely the content of what is taught (p. 453). The teacher too easily turns into some kind of resource, akin to books or to the internet, a "fellow-learner" rather than a teacher (p. 451). Instead of foregrounding the very teaching dynamics at work within the classroom and the institution, in other words, constructivism ultimately hides the teacher from view.[15]

And so Biesta (2013b) advocates giving "teaching 'back' to education" (p. 451), a shift that would re-foreground teaching and correct the turn towards learnification.[16] If we follow Biesta's line of critique, we find ourselves in need of new phrases, ones that affirm teaching and that call out constructivist presumptions as antagonistic to teaching. Biesta's suggestion is a simple one: that we distinguish between "learning from" and "being taught by."

In contrast to learnification, Biesta (2013a) describes "being taught by" as an event which depends upon the particular role that is ascribed to the teacher. When we are being taught, he explained, "someone showed us something or made us realize something *that really entered our being from the outside*" (p. 53). Students who are "being taught" receive something more or different from what they already latently understood. The student "is taught" when he or she cedes control to authority, cultivating openness to receiving teaching as a gift.[17] This event of being taught is contingent, meaning that it cannot be produced with certainty and that its effects cannot be predicted. Being taught, Biesta argues, is best understood as emergent, rather than pre-determined, and the very role of becoming a teacher is also emergent. In other words, the identity of the teacher is not a metaphysical essence that can be pre-determined in advance of the event. Rather, it is relational and uncertain, precarious and difficult.

Both student and teacher enter into important, albeit contingent, roles in the event of being taught. The student finds ways to receive uncomfortable or disorienting truths, truths that she or he does not already possess or have access to. And in the moment that the student "welcomes the unwelcome," the student gives authority to the teaching that she or he receives.[18] The teacher's own role, in other words, is entirely conditional upon the event that she or he is, nonetheless, indispensable in bringing about. In these ways, "being taught" is transformative for both student and teacher.

Conclusion

Biesta's (2013b) affirmation of "being taught" offers a corrective to SoTL's key definitions on several levels. First, in terms of scholarly attentiveness to classroom practices, his distinction between learnification and being taught affirms the gap between the *what* of learning and the *how* of teaching. According to the description of being taught, there is no way to draw causal lines between pedagogical practice and learning outcomes because the event of being taught is one of possibility and newness, challenging commonsensical assumptions about the authority of instructors (Biesta,

2013b, p. 455). This acceptance of the impossibility of charting causal links between lessons and learning runs up against a persistent emphasis in SoTL on identifying expertise about "what works" in the classroom (see Pace, 2004). Rather than asking the "expert" to demonstrate "what works," Biesta (2007) is suggesting that the teacher occupies an emergent role that cannot be presumed or taken for granted. We cannot measure "what works" in the classroom using evidence-based methods because of the "noncausal nature of educational interaction" (p. 10).[19]

Second, Biesta's (2013b) account seeks to reawaken respect, in certain ways, for the teacher. Teachers cannot *produce* the moment of emergence in which a learner is taught, and yet "being taught" does happen and the teacher does matter (p. 457). Biesta's suggestion here is that the very identity of "teacher" be understood as sporadic, one that emerges "at those moments when the gift of teaching is received." Rather than an identity that is possessed, it is an identity that comes into being through the intersubjective dynamics occasioned by the relationality of teaching. Biesta (2013b) explains,

> Calling someone a teacher is therefore ultimately not a matter of referring to a job title or a profession, but is a kind of compliment we pay when we acknowledge—and when we are able to acknowledge—that someone has indeed taught us something, that someone has indeed revealed something to us and that we thus have been taught. (p. 457)

The attempt to measure and quantify teaching, then, is at odds with the very dynamics that make "being taught" possible. Referring to teaching as a gift, Biesta points out that there can be no expectation of reciprocity or of measuring the adequacy of a response to the gift of being taught.[20]

Third, Biesta's (2013b) account of "being taught" affirms the surprise, the otherness, and the newness that are all constitutive of the event of learning. If SoTL research over-determines the meaning of learning, such that it accords too smoothly with the researcher's expectations of what is being observed and measured (and with administrative prerogatives of accountability), then on Biesta's terms, then this research misses the dynamics of teaching entirely. More generally, on the individual level and the institutional level, Biesta warns in an interview, we can be complicit with conditions which elide the otherness of intersubjectivity and which bracket the emergence of the new (Winter, 2012). The danger posed by SoTL's guiding definitions, in other words, especially if they are not subjected to scrutiny, is that they call into question the possibility of being taught at all.

So are there examples of research into "being taught" that seem to heed Biesta's (2010) call for faculty members to resist the lures of learnification? A survey of research methods that I conducted over the past semester indicates that many instructors are experimenting with this kind of openness to the new. Especially in terms of assessment practices, professors ask students to self-evaluate through Mindful Reading Assignments (Strawser, 2009) and reflective self-studies (see Gehrke, 1998). Professors intensify the kinds of choices that students must navigate by crafting course syllabi in which there is conceptual dissonance (Jaarsma, 2010) and in which choices are maximized throughout the semester (James & Walsh, 2011), moments in which students confront the limits of their understanding and face the possibility of an event of being taught. As a way to resist

the pre-determined nature of learning outcomes, instructors subvert pre-specified competencies that can be measured by using comedy (Griffiths & Peters, 2014) and irony (Sæverot, 2013).

From within the bounds of SoTL, there are examples of researchers like Cranton (2011) who argue that SoTL work needs to include explicit reflection on the institutional norms and societal contexts of teaching and learning, suggesting that critical approaches to instrumental neoliberalism might be synced with the quest for scholarly teaching. As Servage (2009) points out, however, the SoTL movement lines up with the increasing pressure on higher education to demonstrate effective assessment practices in response to consumer-based approaches to education. At the very least, it seems that for SoTL to engage with the kind of shift that Biesta and others are advocating, it will need to subject its commitments to empiricism to critical reflection. As mentioned above, there is an emerging debate within SoTL about the need to address its over-representation of the sciences and social sciences. Even if empirical methods are called into question and supplemented with methods found within the arts and humanities, however, the central animating hopes of SoTL would need to be abandoned: the hope that scholarly teaching will yield "expert" teachers, for example, and that these expert teachers are reliably able to produce good learning. But if SoTL as a movement cultivates openness to the contingent and the unexpected, especially as events that have the potential to undermine the neoliberal prescriptions that have led to learnification, it will tap into new hopes about the emancipatory possibilities of teaching.

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[1] More specifically, Boyer (1990) makes the case for the expansion of research into four separate, overlapping functions: the scholarship of discovery; the scholarship of integration; the scholarship of application; the scholarship of teaching.

[2] See Pace and Middendorf (2004) as a representative text of this promise that SoTL practitioners become experts as scholarly teachers in their respective disciplines.

[3] While what counts as relevant theoretical frameworks for SoTL has recently emerged as more of an open question, (Clegg 2012; Kreber 2013b) the reliance upon empiricist methods means that there is a substantive under-representation of humanities approaches in SoTL projects and publications.

[4] For a stronger critique of this empiricist tendency, see Barrow's (2006) argument that empirical research is at best ineffective when it comes to researching good teaching.

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[5] Chick (2013) concludes that "these instances suggest that SOTL doesn't welcome the valuable ways in which many scholars—especially those in the humanities and fine arts—are trained to conduct research, make meaning, and demonstrate knowledge" (p. 17).
[6] In this essay, I am especially interested in reflecting on this latter assumption, which seems to be the most contentious but also most compelling claim of SoTL: namely, that the systematic study of teaching and learning yields better teaching and learning. This claim also seems to be the key vested interest *of* SoTL. Its origin story, which I discuss below, centres around the need to assure the public that faculty members at universities care about and are accountable for good teaching and learning.
[7] It seems significant that Ochoa's article is published in a journal for administrators within higher education. I examine below some of the uncomfortable implications of the close relationship between SoTL and administration-led initiatives.
[8] See also Kline and Abowitz (2013), who describe teachers as "machinelike and externally-mandated," explaining that "teachers now exist within the orchestrated rituals of test-driven curriculum and assessment" (p. 162).
[9] The neoliberal turn towards the corporatization and instrumentalization of knowledge has tremendous and problematic ramifications for education. Put simply, students become consumers, on the hook for enormous student debt; university budgets extend to vast increases in administrative costs but limit the costs of teaching by turning labour into adjunct and sessional contract work; the value of education is determined entirely by marketplace dictates. For an analysis of how neoliberalism implicates pedagogy, especially in terms of critical theory, see Wagner and Yee (2011).
[10] Harper's index. (2013, September). *Harper's Magazine, 327*, 13.
[11] Bauman (2012) identifies the very predicament of scholarly enterprise in the contemporary academy: "In our societies with allegedly knowledge-powered and information-driven economies and education-driven economic success, knowledge seems to be failing to guarantee success, and education failing to deliver that knowledge. The vision of education-driven upward mobility, neutralizing the toxins of inequality, making them liveable with and rendering them harmless, and yet more disastrously the vision of education being able to keep upward social mobility in operation—these two visions are beginning simultaneously to evaporate" (p. 72).
[12] Richardson (2003) defines constructivism as "a theory of *learning* and not a theory of teaching" (p. 1629, emphasis added).
[13] See Roth (2011) for a wide-ranging and incisive critique of constructivism in relation to educational theories and cognitive science. While Roth looks to deconstruction for philosophical resources, his critique resonates clearly with the existential critique of Biesta that I explore below. Roth (2011) writes, "How can a cognitive organism intend learning something that is unknown and therefore *cannot* be the object of intention and therefore cannot be aimed at by the learner" (p. 8)? Roth makes a convincing case for the fact that constructivist frameworks, although highly influential for educational research and policy, "do not work" when it comes to understanding the nature of teaching and learning.
[14] See also Längle and Abowitz, (2013) who describe teachers as "machinelike and externally-mandated," explaining that "teachers now exist within the orchestrated rituals of test-driven curriculum and assessment" (p. 162).
[15] As Bingham (2008) points out, since authority is always relational, even a student-centred practice like questioning is charged with the dynamics of circuitry. In other words, the focus on student learning undercuts and blocks from view the dynamic relationality that arises within educational contexts.
[16] A different critique of constructivist approaches to education can be found in debates within cognitive psychology (Tobias & Duffy, 2009). While these debates differ from Biesta's analysis, they both point to the significant problems that emerge when the teacher's own instruction, role, and guidance is overly deemphasized or undertheorized.
[17] Biesta (2013b) is referring to the economy of the gift, as described by Jacques Derrida, when he aligns "being taught" with receiving a gift. Such a gift is unexpected, cannot be recompensed, and reflects an inevitable asymmetry between giver and receiver.
[18] Biesta (2013b) explains, "To receive the gift of teaching, to welcome the unwelcome, to give a place to inconvenient truths and difficult knowledge, is precisely the moment where we *give authority* to the teaching we receive. In this sense—and presumably only in this sense—can the idea of authority have a meaningful place in education" (p. 458).

[19] As Biesta (2013b) points out, objective uncertainties cannot be measured, and therefore "the educational 'project' always needs to engage with its own impossibility" (p. 459).

[20] Another way to put this is that the event of teaching is transcendent. As Schrag's (2013) explication of transcendence makes clear, "To give a gift in expectation of a return in kind is effectively to negate the gift as gift. This is why the grammar of 'gift exchange' is conceptually incoherent" (p. 43): the gift surpasses all exchange transactions, and it is incommensurable with any logic that calls for an accounting of its dynamics.

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