Good Education in an Age of Measurement: On the Need to Reconnect with the Question of Purpose in Education

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GOOD EDUCATION IN AN AGE OF MEASUREMENT: ON THE NEED TO RECONNECT WITH THE QUESTION OF PURPOSE IN EDUCATION
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Introduction: Valuing what we measure or measuring what we value?
The past 20 years have seen a remarkable rise in interest in the measurement of education or, in the lingo of the educational measurement culture, the measurement of educational 'outcomes.' Perhaps the most prominent manifestation of this phenomenon can be found in international comparative studies such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). These studies, which result in league tables that are assumed to indicate who is better and who is best, are intended to provide information about how national education systems perform compared to those of other countries and are thus generally competitive in their outlook. Findings are utilised by national governments to inform educational policy, often under the banner of 'raising standards.'

League tables are also produced at national level with the aim of providing information about the relative performance of individual schools or school districts. Such league tables have a complicated rationale, combining accountability and choice elements with a social justice argument which says that everyone should have access to education of the same quality. At the same time, the data used for producing such league tables are used to identify so-called 'failing schools' and, in some cases, 'failing teachers' within schools. The irony of these arguments is that accountability is often limited to choice from a set menu and thus lacks a real democratic dimension (see Biesta 2004a), that the elasticity of school choice is generally very limited, and also that equality of opportunity hardly ever translates into equality of outcomes because of the role of structural factors that are beyond the control of schools and teachers, thus also undermining part of the 'blame and shame' culture of school failure (see Tomlinson 1997; Nicolaidou & Ainscow 2005; Hess 2006; Granger 2008).

Interest in the measurement of educational outcomes has not been restricted to the construction of league tables. The measurement of outcomes and their correlation with educational 'input' is also central to research which aims to provide an evidence-base for educational practice (see Biesta 2007a). Proponents of the idea that education should be transformed into an evidence-based profession argue that it is only through the conduct of large-scale experimental studies – the randomised controlled field trial being the 'gold standard' – and careful measurement of the correlation between input and output, that education will be able to witness "the kind of progressive, systematic improvement over time that has characterized successful parts of our economy and society throughout the twentieth century, in fields such as medicine, agriculture, transportation and technology" (Slavin 2002, p.16). In the USA the reauthorization in 2001 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act ('No Child Left Behind') has resulted in a situation where federal research funding is only available for research which utilises this particular methodology in order to generate scientific knowledge about 'what works.'

An important precursor of many of these developments can be found in research on school effectiveness, which played an influential role in discussions about educational change and improvement from the early 1980s onwards (see Townsend 2001; Luyten et al. 2005). While the research initially focused on overall school and administrative variables, later work increasingly paid attention to the dynamics of teaching and learning in order to identify the variables that matter in making schooling more effective. With it came a shift towards a more narrow view of relevant outcomes and outputs (see, e.g., Rutter & Maugham 2002; Gray 2004). In recent years the movement as a whole seems to have become more interested in the wider question of school improvement rather than just issues concerning effectiveness (see, e.g., Townsend 2007). Notwithstanding this, the school effectiveness and improvement movement has played an important role in the idea that educational outcomes can and should be measured.

The rise of the measurement culture in education has had a profound impact on educational practice, from the highest levels of educational policy at national and supra-national level down to the practices of local schools and teachers. To some extent this impact has been beneficial as it has allowed for discussions to be based on factual data rather than just assumptions or opinions about what might be the case. The problem is, however, that the abundance of information about educational outcomes has given the impression that decisions about the direction of educational policy and the shape and form of educational practice can be based solely upon factual information. Despite the fact that this is what increasingly is happening in discussions about education in the wake of international comparisons, league tables, accountability, evidence-based education and effective schooling, there are two (obvious) problems with this way of thinking.

The first is that whilst it is always advisable to use factual information when making decisions about what ought to be done, what ought to be done can never be logically *derived* from what is. This problem, which in the philosophical literature is known as the is-ought problem and was first identified by the Scottish philosopher David Hume in *A Treatise on Human Nature* (1739-1740), means that when we are engaged in decision making about the direction of education we are always and necessarily engaged in value judgements – judgements about what is educationally *desirable*. This implies that if we wish to say something about the direction of education we always need to complements factual information with views about what is desirable. We need, in other words, to *evaluate* the data and for this, as has been known for a long time in the field of educational evaluation, we need to engage with values (see, e.g, House & Howe 1999; Henry 2002; Schwandt & Dahler-Larsen 2006). The second problem, which is related to the first and in a sense is its methodological equivalent, is the problem of the validity of our measurements. More than just the question of the *technical validity* of our measurements – i.e., whether we are measuring what we intend to measure – the problem here lies with what I suggest to call the *normative validity* of our measurements. This it the question whether we are indeed measuring what we value, or whether we are just measuring what we can easily measure and thus end up valuing what we (can) measure.

The need to engage explicitly with values in our decisions about the direction of education is easily overlooked, particularly in those cases in which the concepts that

are used already appear to express values. An example of this can be found in discussions about educational effectiveness. Apart from the fact that it is difficult to make a case for education that is *not* effective – which gives the idea of educational effectiveness a *prima facie* plausibility – 'effectiveness' is actually a value. This seems to suggest that an argument for effective schooling or teacher effectiveness is exactly doing what I am suggesting we should do. The problem is, however, that effectiveness is an *instrumental* value, a value which says something about the quality of *processes* and, more specifically, about their ability to bring about certain outcomes in a secure way. But whether the outcomes themselves are desirable is an entirely different matter – a matter for which we need value-based judgements that are not informed by instrumental values but by what we might best call *ultimate* values: values about the aims and purposes of education. This is why effective education is not enough – and a case can even be made that sometimes educational strategies that are not effective, for example because they provide opportunities for students to explore their own ways of thinking, doing and being, can be more desirable than those that effectively proceed towards a pre-specified end. Instead of simply making a case for effective education, we always need to ask 'Effective for what?' – and given that what might be effective for one particular situation or one group of students but not necessarily in another situation or for other groups of students, we also always need to ask 'Effective for whom?' (see Bogotch, Mirón & Biesta 2007).

In order to bring issues of value and purpose back into our discussions about education, particularly in situations in which measurement figures prominently, we need to re-engage with the question as to what constitutes *good* education, and it is to this that I wish to contribute in this paper. I will do this in two steps. In the next section I explore why we seem to have lost sight of questions about values, purpose and the goodness of education. I suggest that at least part of the explanation for this has to do with what I will refer to as the 'learnification' of education: the transformation of an educational vocabulary into a language of learning. After this I will present my contribution to the discussion about what constitutes good education. I will not do this by specifying what the aim or aims of education should be, but by suggesting a conceptual framework based on a distinction between the qualification, socialisation and subjectification function of education, which might help us in asking better and more precise questions about the aims and ends of education. I illustrate the framework with a brief discussion of two examples: citizenship education and mathematics education. This is not to suggest that the framework is only relevant in relation to particular curricular questions. My contention is that a more precise focus on what constitutes good education is crucial for the way we approach *all* dimensions of education, and particularly for those aspects where we engage most explicitly with questions of values, such as in the fields of assessment, educational evaluation, and in relation to questions about accountability.

The 'Learnification' of Education
The background of this paper lies in the remarkable absence in many contemporary discussions about education of explicit attention for what is educationally desirable. There is much discussion about educational processes and their improvement but very little about what such processes are supposed to bring about. There is very little explicit discussion, in other words, about what constitutes *good* education (see Fischman, DiBara & Gardner 2006; on good educational research see Hostetler 2005; on responsible assessment see Siegel 2004). Why might this be so?

On the one hand the question of educational purpose might be seen as too difficult to resolve or even as fundamentally irresolvable. This is particularly the case when ideas about the purpose(s) of education are seen as being entirely dependent upon personal – which often means: subjective – values and beliefs about which no rational discussion is possible. This often lies behind a dichotomous depiction of views about the aims of education in terms of conservatism versus progressivism or traditional versus liberal. One question is whether such value positions are indeed entirely subjective and thus beyond rational discussion. But even if it may be difficult to reach a resolution, it could be argued that, at least in democratic societies, there ought to be an ongoing discussion about the aims and ends of (public) education – how hard such a discussion might be. (For an interesting account of an attempt by the Scottish Parliament to have such a discussion see Pirrie & Lowden 2004; see also Allen 2003.)

What is more likely, though, is that the absence of explicit attention for the aims and ends of education is the effect of often implicit reliance on a particular 'common sense' view of what education is for. We have to bear in mind, however, that what appears as 'common sense' often serves the interests of some groups (much) better than those of others. The prime example of a common sense view about the purpose of education is the idea that what matters most is academic achievement in a small number of curricular domains, particularly language, science and mathematics – and it this common sense view which has given so much credibility to studies such as TIMMS, PIRLS and PISA. (This common sense view is mainly constructed, therefore, in terms of what I will refer to below as the qualification function of education.) Whether academic knowledge is indeed of more value than, for example, vocational skills, all depends on the access such knowledge gives to particular positions in society and this, as sociological analysis has abundantly shown, is exactly how the reproduction of social inequality through education works. It is, therefore, first of all in the interest of those who benefit from the status quo to keep things as they are and not open up a discussion about what education might be. What makes the situation even more complicated is that those in disadvantaged positions often tend to support the status quo in the (often mistaken) expectation that they will eventually also acquire the benefits currently available to those in more privileged positions (a phenomenon which, elsewhere, I have characterised as 'middle class anxiety'; see Biesta 2004a). An example of this can be found in the UK government's target which says that eventually 50% of the population should go to higher education. Whereas this seems to be an attractive and emancipatory ambition, it is often forgotten that once this target will be reached, the current positional advantage of having a higher degree will have dramatically changed and other mechanisms of 'distinction' – such as the difference between a degree from a 'good' or a 'not-so-good' university as expressed in university league tables – will have taken over to reproduce existing inequalities in different ways (see also Ross 1991; Rancière 1991)

The reasons for the relative absence of attention to questions about educational purpose are, however, not merely 'external.' I wish to argue that they also have to do with transformations within the field of education itself and that they are closely connected to a shift in the vocabulary that is being used to talk about educational processes and practices. As I have argued elsewhere in more detail (see Biesta 2004b; 2006a), the past two decades have witnessed a remarkable rise of the concept of 'learning' with a subsequent decline of the concept of 'education' (for more empirical

support for this thesis see Haugsbakk & Nordkvelle 2007). This rise of what I have called the 'new language of learning' is manifest, for example, in the redefinition of teaching as the facilitation of learning and of education as the provision of learning opportunities or learning experiences; it can be seen in the use of the word 'learner' instead of 'student' or 'pupil'; it is manifest in the transformation of adult education into adult learning, and in the replacement of 'permanent education' by 'lifelong learning.' 'Learning' has also become a favourite concept in policy documents, such as, in the UK, *The Learning Age* (DfEE 1998) and *Learning to Succeed* (DfEE 1999). The following extract is a perfect example of the 'new language of learning.'

> Placing learners and learning at the centre of education and training methods and processes is by no means a new idea, but in practice, the established framing of pedagogic practices in most formal contexts has privileged teaching rather than learning. (...) In a high-technology knowledge society, this kind of teaching-learning loses efficacy: learners must become proactive and more autonomous, prepared to renew their knowledge continuously and to respond constructively to changing constellations of problems and contexts. The teacher's role becomes one of accompaniment, facilitation, mentoring, support and guidance in the service of learners' own efforts to access, use and ultimately create knowledge. (Commission of the European Communities 1998, p.9, quoted in Field 2000, p.136)

Despite the omnipresence of the concept of learning in current educational discourse, it is important to see that the new language of learning is not the outcome of one particular process or the expression of a single underlying agenda. It rather is the result of a combination of different, partly even contradictory trends and developments. These include (1) the rise of new theories of learning that have put emphasis on the active role of students in the construction of knowledge and understanding and the more facilitating role of teachers in this; (2) the postmodern critique of the idea that educational processes can be controlled by teachers and ought to be controlled by them; (3) the so-called 'silent explosion' of learning (Field 2000) as evidenced in the huge rise of informal learning throughout people's lives; and (4) the erosion of the welfare state which has shifted the responsibility for (lifelong) learning from 'provider' to 'consumer', turning education from a right into a duty (for more detail see Biesta 2004b; 2006a; see also Biesta 2006b).

The rise of the new language of learning can be seen as the expression of a more general trend to which I now wish to refer – with a deliberately ugly term – as the 'learnification' of education: the transformation of everything there is to say about education in terms of learning and learners. A focus on learning and learners is, of course, not all bad or problematic. To see that learning is not determined by input but depends on the activities of students – although not a new insight – can help to rethink what teachers could do best to support their students' learning. There are even emancipatory possibilities in the new language of learning to the extent to which it can empower individuals to take control of their own educational agendas. Yet there are also several problems connected with the rise of the new language of learning – and we shouldn't underestimate the ways in which language structures possible ways of thinking, doing and reasoning to the detriment of other ways of thinking, doing and reasoning. In the context of this paper I wish to highlight two problematic aspects of

the new language of learning. One is that 'learning' is basically an *individualistic* concept. It refers to what people, as individuals do – even if it is couched in such notions as collaborative or cooperative learning. This stands in stark contrast to the concept of 'education' which always implies a relationship: someone educating someone else and the person educating thus having a certain sense of what the purpose of his or her activities is. The second problem is that 'learning' is basically a *process* term. It denotes processes and activities but is open – if not empty – with regard to content and direction.

This helps to explain why the rise of the new language of learning has made it more difficult to ask questions about content, purpose and direction of education. It is important, in this context, to note that the rise of the new language of learning is part of a wider process of the 'learnification' of education, a process which is increasingly having an impact on educational policy and practice itself. We can see this, for example, in the increased emphasis in education on personal qualities and capacities – such as in the Scottish national curriculum framework 'A Curriculum for Excellence' which specifies the aims of education in terms of enabling the development of four 'capacities', that of the successful learner, the confident individual, the responsible citizen and the effective contributor (see Scottish Executive 2004) – a trend which verges on turning education into a form of therapy that is more concerned with the emotional well-being of pupils and student than with their emancipation (see Ecclestone and Hayes 2008; see also Biesta in press[a]). What is disappearing from the horizon in this process is a recognition that it also matters *what* pupils and students learn and what they learn it *for* – that it matters, for example, what kind of citizens they are supposed to become and what kind of democracy this is supposed to bring about (see Biesta in press[b]) – and that, for this reason, education can and in a certain sense even ought to be difficult and challenging rather than that it is just (depicted as) a smooth process which aims to meet the supposed 'needs' of the learner (see Biesta 2004b; see also Biesta 2001).

How, then, can we bring questions of purpose and direction back onto the educational agenda? To this question I turn next.

What is Education For?
My aim in this paper is not to specify what the purpose or purposes of education should be. I have rather set myself the more modest task of outlining the parameters of what I think should frame discussions about the aims and ends of education, acknowledging that there is already a wide range of different views available and also acknowledging that in democratic societies there should be an ongoing discussion about the purposes of education – both with regard to state-funded and privately-funded education. One way to develop a framework for discussions about the aims and ends of education is to start from the actual functions educational systems perform. I wish to suggest that education generally performs three different (but related; see below) functions, to which I will refer to as the qualification, socialisation and subjectification function of education.

A major function of education – of schools and other educational institutions – lies in the *qualification* of children, young people and adults. It lies in providing them with the knowledge, skills and understanding and often also with the dispositions and forms of judgement that allow them to 'do something' – a 'doing' which can range

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from the very specific (such as in the case of training for a particular job or profession, or training for a particular skill or technique) to the much more general (such as in the case of the introduction to modern culture or Western civilisation, the teaching of life skills, etcetera). The qualification function is without doubt one of the major functions of organised education and is an important rationale for having state-funded education in the first place. This is particularly, but not exclusively, connected to economic arguments, i.e., to the role education plays in the preparation of the workforce and, through this, in the contribution education makes to economic development and growth. That this is an important rationale can be seen in ongoing discussions between governments and employers and employers organisations about the apparent failure of education to provide adequate preparation for work – something which, in the UK, is often referred to as the 'skills gap'. The qualification function is, however, not restricted to preparation for the world of work. Providing students with knowledge and skills is also important for other aspects of their functioning. Here we can think, for example, of political literacy – the knowledge and skills needed for citizenship – or cultural literacy more generally – the knowledge and skills considered to be necessary to function in society more generally. (Whether it is possible to specify this is, of course, another matter – and a contentious one; see, e.g., Hirsch 1988; Apple 1993.)

Here, however, we move into a second major function of education to which I will refer as the *socialisation function*. The socialisation function has to do with the many ways in which, through education, we become members of and part of particular social, cultural and political 'orders'. There can be no doubt that this is one of the actual 'effects' of education, since education is never neutral but always represents something and does so in particular ways. Sometimes socialisation is actively pursued by educational institutions, for example with regard to the transmission of particular norms and values, in relation to the continuation of particular cultural or religious traditions, or for the purpose professional socialisation. But even if socialisation is not the explicit aim of educational programmes and practices, it will still function in this way as, for example, has been shown by research on the hidden curriculum. Through its socialising function education inserts individuals into existing ways of doing and being and, through this, plays an important role in the continuation of culture and tradition – both with regard to its desirable and its undesirable aspects.

Education does, however, not only contribute to qualification and socialisation but also impacts on what we might refer to as processes of individuation or, as I prefer to call it, processes of subjectification – of becoming a subject. The *subjectification function* might perhaps best be understood as the opposite of the socialization function. It is precisely *not* about the insertion of 'newcomers' into existing orders, but about ways of being that hint at independence from such orders; ways of being in which the individual is not simply a 'specimen' of a more encompassing order. Whether all education actually contributes to subjectification is debatable. Some would argue that this is not necessarily the case and that the actual influence of education can be confined to qualification and socialisation. Others would argue that education always also impacts on the individual – and in this way it always also has an individuating 'effect'. What matters more however, and here we need to shift the discussion from questions about the actual functions of education to questions about the aims, ends and purposes of education, is the 'quality' of subjectification, i.e., the kind of subjectivity – or kinds of subjectivities – that are made possible as a result of

particular educational arrangements and configurations. It is in relation to this that some would argue – and have argued (see, e.g., in the analytical tradition Peters 1966; 1976; Dearden, Hirst & Peters 1972; and, for a recent contribution, Winch 2005; and in the critical tradition Mollenhauer 1964; Freire 1970; Giroux 1981) – that any education worthy of its name should always contribute to processes of subjectification that allow those educated to become more autonomous and independent in their thinking and acting.

The main contribution I wish to make with this paper is to suggest that when we engage in discussions about what constitutes good education we should acknowledge that this is a 'composite' question, i.e., that in order to answer this question we need to acknowledge the different functions of education and the different potential purposes of education. An answer to the question what constitutes good education should therefore always specify its views about qualification, socialisation *and* subjectification – even in the unlikely case that one would wish to argue that only one of them matters. To say that the question of what constitutes good education is a composite question, is not to suggest that the three dimensions of education can and should be seen as entirely separate. The contrary is the case. When we engage in qualification, we always also impact on socialisation and on subjectification. Similarly, when we engage in socialisation, we always do so in relation to particular content – and hence link up with the qualification function – and will have an impact on subjectification. And when we engage in education that puts subjectification first, we will usually still do so in relation to particular curricular content and this will always also have a socialising effect. The three functions of education can therefore best be represented in the form of a Venn-diagram, i.e., as three overlapping areas, and the more interesting and important questions are actually about the intersections between the areas rather than the individual areas per se.

Where we do need to separate the three dimensions of education is in terms of our rationales for education, i.e., our answers to the question what constitutes good education. Here it is important to be explicit about how our answer relates to qualification, socialisation and/or subjectification. The most important point is that we are aware of these dimensions, of the fact that they require different rationales, and also of the fact that while synergy is possible, there is also potential for conflict between the three dimensions, particularly, so I wish to suggest, between the qualification and socialisation dimension on the one hand and the subjectification dimension on the other.

One issue which I can not discuss in any detail has to do with the question to what extent and in what way it is actually possible to make a distinction between socialisation and subjectification. Our answer to this question depends on whether we believe that it is possible to occupy a position which is 'beyond' tradition. Whereas postmodern critics have argued that such a position is no longer possible and that we should therefore concede that education for (rational) autonomy is just one more form of (modern, Western) socialisation, I have argued that it is precisely with the help of postmodern theory and philosophy that we can still make a distinction between socialisation and subjectification, albeit that this is no longer based upon a notion of rationality or autonomy, but connected to the idea of a kind of 'uniqueness' which comes to light in responsible responsiveness to alterity and difference (see Biesta 2006; 2007b; in press[c]).

Two examples: Citizenship Education and Mathematics Education
In order to make my proposals a bit more concrete, I will briefly show what using the framework outlined above implies for our discussions about the aims and ends of education. I will do this in relation to two curricular areas: citizenship education and mathematics education.

To begin with the first: there is a strong tendency in the literature to confine (the rationale) for citizenship education to qualification, that is, to providing children and young people with the knowledge, skills and dispositions – known in the literature as the 'citizenship dimensions' (see Kerr 2005) – that are considered to be essential for their citizenship. The focus of citizenship education in this view is that of the development of political literacy – although within this idea we can find a spectrum from a focus on knowledge about the rights and duties of citizens and the workings of the political system on the one end towards, on the other end of the spectrum, a more fully-blown form of critical political literacy which emphasises the ability to critically analyse the dynamics of political processes and practices. Quite often the rationale for an exclusive focus on qualification in citizenship education stems from a fear for explicit political socialisation: a fear, that is, for being seen to advocate indoctrination of a particular set of political values and convictions – often expressed in the idea that citizenship education should stay away from party politics. Notwithstanding this, many programmes for citizenship education are actually based upon views about what constitutes a good citizen. The approach to education for citizenship in Scotland, for example (see Biesta in press[b]), clearly states that children and young people should be enabled to become responsible citizens – and thus represents a clear view about the kind of knowledge, skills and dispositions students should acquire, but also about the kind of citizen they should become. The rationale for education for citizenship in Scotland thus clearly contains a socialisation dimension. Scotland is not the only example of an approach to citizenship education which has clear views about the kind of citizen it aspires to bring about; many programmes for citizenship education are actually based upon pre-defined views of what a good – which often means: an obedient and well-behaved – citizen looks like (see Biesta & Lawy 2006; Lawy & Biesta 2006). The question, however, is not only whether citizenship education should confine itself to the transmission of citizenship dimensions and thus stay within the domain of qualification, or should also focus on bringing about a particular kind of citizen. There is also the question whether citizenship education can and should contribute to what we might refer to as political subjectification, i.e., to the promotion of a kind of citizenship that is not merely about the reproduction of a predefined template but takes political agency seriously. Citizenship education that is interested in this approach moves its rationale clearly into the direction of the subjectification dimension of education. What this example makes clear, therefore, is that there are different answers to the question as to what good citizenship education is and what it should aim for, depending on whether we focus on qualification, socialisation or subjectification. As mentioned before, the idea is not that we need to choose between the three. Political knowledge and understanding (qualification) can be an important element for the development of political ways of being and doing (subjectification), just as a strong focus on socialisation into a particular citizenship order can actually lead to resistance which, in itself, can be taken as a sign of subjectification.

While it may seem rather easy to connect a subject like citizenship education with the three purposes of education, this may appear to be more difficult when we focus on a much more traditional subject; a subject, moreover, which clearly is about the acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding. But even when we look at a subject like mathematics, it is possible – and in my view actually quite important – to think through the rationale for mathematics education in the same way as I have done with regard to education for citizenship. It is clear that there is a strong focus within mathematics education on qualification: on providing students with mathematical knowledge and skills and, most importantly, mathematical understanding in order to become proficient in mathematics. There is, however, an important socialisation dimension to this as well. After all, to include mathematics on the curriculum and to give it a prominent place in testing and definitions of educational success, already conveys a particular message about the importance of mathematics and thus can be seen as socialisation into a world in which mathematics carries importance. Socialisation into such a world can also be an explicit aim of mathematics education – and teachers may well want to convince their students that engagement with mathematics is indeed important. We can take this argument one step further. The idea that mathematics education is about the transfer of a particular body of knowledge and skills is based upon a particular epistemology. If, instead of seeing mathematics as a body of knowledge and skills we understand it as a social practice – a practice with a particular history and with a particular social 'present' – we can even begin to develop a rationale for mathematics education which gives a central place to socialisation, seeing it as an engagement with the social practice of 'mathematising' rather than as the acquisition of a body of knowledge and skills (for such a rationale see Biesta 2005). This, however, does not exhaust the possible rationales for mathematics education, since we can also ask what kind of opportunities a field like mathematics might offer our students for subjectification, that is, for becoming a particular kind of person, e.g., a person who, through the power or mathematical reasoning is able to gain a more autonomous or considered position towards tradition and common sense. Or we might explore the moral possibilities of mathematics – e.g., by treating division in relation to sharing or to questions about fairness and justice – and, through this, use the potential of mathematics to contribute to subjectification.

Concluding Remarks

In this paper I have tried to make a case for the need to reconnect with the question of purpose in education. I have shown that we now live in age in which discussions about education are dominated by measurement and comparisons of educational outcomes and that these measurements as such seem to direct much of educational policy and, through this, also much of educational practice. The danger here is that we end up valuing what is measured, rather than that we engage in measurement of what we value. It is the latter, however, that should ultimately inform our decisions about the direction of education, which is why I have argued that we should give prominence to the question as to what constitutes *good* education, rather than just paying attention to effective education. I have tried to indicate why questions about the aims and ends of education seem to have disappeared from our horizon, and have connected this specifically with the rise of the language of learning and the wider 'learnification' of education. I have not tried to answer the question as to what constitutes good education, not in the least because I am ware of the plurality of visions about this and am also convinced about the importance to keep the discussion about this going, rather than to close it down prematurely. My contribution in this

paper has consisted in emphasising that the question of good education is a composite question. This means that in our discussions about the purpose of education we need to distinguish between the ways in which education can contribute to qualification, to socialisation and to subjectification. I have now wanted to suggest that it is always easy to do so, and even less that, once we have articulated our views about what we think education is for, that it is easy to measure all aspects. But if we are not explicit about our views about the aims and ends of education – if we do not tackle the questions as to what constitutes good education head on – we run the risk that statistics and league tables will make these decisions for us. We therefore need to keep the question of purpose – the question of what constitutes good education – central in our educational discussions and wider endeavours. This is as important for the everyday practice of schooling, as it is for those instances where we engage more explicitly with the assessment of our own educational practices and our students' achievements – such as in the case of student assessment, in the case of the evaluation of programmes and practices, and when we as educators are called to account for our actions and decisions. In all cases a concern for good education rather than a concern for effective education or for learning as such, that is without any specification of the learning 'of what' and 'for what', should be central to our considerations.

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