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ABSTRACT
                    Over the past 2 decades, a shift has taken place in the
language of education. The most prominent semantic marker of this shift is
the increase in the use of the word learning and the subsequent decrease in
the use of the word education. This short paper contends that the very
language educators use to speak and write about education makes certain
arguments and lines of thinking possible and, consequently, makes others far
more difficult. The "game of language" and the "game of education" are played
differently. Herein lies the danger of the "new language of learning." It
allows a way to talk about education that misconstrues what education is
about. This paper contends that education is, in a fundamental and even a
structural sense, a difficult process that can be made easier by an
educational relationship, not merely meeting the needs of the learner. It
defines the educational relationship in terms of three interlocking
processes: trust without ground (learners willing to take a risk);
transcendental violence (teachers asking the difficult questions); and
responsibility without knowledge (teachers taking responsibility for the
"subjectivity" of the student). It is this educational relationship that
makes education possible. (Contains end notes and 25 references.) (WFA)

Trust, Violence, and Responsibility:

Reclaiming Education in an Age of Learning

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The new language of learning

I recently received the first draft of a text for an on-line course in educational research for research students in education. What struck me about this text, and for a moment even led me to think that I had opened the wrong attachment, was the fact that the text consistently referred to the prospective users of the website as 'clients.' Although the word 'client' has been around in educational settings for some time, especially in the context of adult education, the consistent use of this word and the equally consistent avoidance of the word 'student,' were for me just one more example of a remarkable shift that seems to have taken place in the language of education over the past two decades.

There are several 'semantic markers' of this shift, but by far the most prominent one is the increase in the use of the word 'learning' and the subsequent decrease in the use of the word 'education.'[1] Teaching has, for example, become redefined as 'supporting' or 'facilitating' learning, just as education is now often described as the provision of 'learning opportunities' or 'learning experiences.' 'Adult education' has been replaced by 'adult learning,' and governments of many countries nowadays stress the need for 'lifelong learning' and the development of a 'learning society,' instead of talking about 'permanent' or 'recurrent' education (see, e.g., Ranson 1994; 1998; Edwards 1997; Field, 2000). 'Learning' has also become a favourite concepts in policy documents. The English government has, for example, recently produced policy documents with titles such as *The Learning Age: A Renaissance for a New Britain* (DfEE 1998) and *Learning to Succeed* (DfEE 1999). The UK now even has an internet based provision for everyone who wants to learn, called *Learn Direct* -- or to be more precise, since this is a registered trademark: *learndirect*®. The first page of their website says it as follows:

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Welcome to **learndirect**.

learndirect is a brand new form of learning - that's for everyone!

learndirect learning is designed with you in mind. Our courses are computer-based but don't let that bother you! The easiest way to get started is to go to one of the many **learndirect** centres around the country. Our friendly staff will be on hand to help you out. You don't need any experience - we'll take you through your learning step by step. (http://www.learndirect.co.uk/personal accessed at 10/03/02)

'Learning,' in short, seems nowadays not only to be everywhere. It also seems to be everything. The following extract from a document on lifelong learning produced by the European Commission provides a telling example of what I propose to call 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)

Although the concept of 'learning' has become almost omnipresent in contemporary educational discourse, it is important to see that the 'new language of learning' is *not* the expression of one single underlying process or agenda, but that it reflects several different trends, developments, concerns and interests. There are at least four trends that in one way or another have contributed to the shift from the language of education to the language of learning.

(1) One influential development can be found in the field of the psychology of learning and concerns the emergence of constructivist and socio-cultural theories of learning (see, e.g., Fosnot 1996; Lave and Wenger 1991). The idea that learning is not a passive intake of information, but that knowledge and understanding are actively constructed by the learner -- often in co-operation with fellow-learners -- has moved the attention away from the activities of the teacher to the activities of the student. This has not only made learning much more central in the understanding of the process of education. Notions such as 'scaffolding' (see, e.g., Bliss et al.) have provided a perspective and a language in which teaching can easily be redefined as the facilitation of learning.

(2) The impact of postmodernism on education and educational theory is another trend which has contributed to the demise of 'education' and the rise of 'learning.' Many authors have argued that the 'project' of education is a thoroughly modern project, something which is especially visible in such ambitions as liberation and emancipation (see, e.g., Usher & Edwards 1994). But if this is so, then the postmodern doubt about the possibility and viability of the 'project' of modernity has immediate repercussion for the project of education (see Biesta, 1998). If we have indeed reached 'the end of education' (see, e.g., Giesecke 1985), then what else can there be left but learning?

(3) The rise of 'learning' is not only to be accounted for on the level of theoretical and conceptual shifts. Field (2000, pp.35-67), for example, has argued that nowadays more and more people are spending more and more of their time (and money) in all kind of different forms of learning, both inside and outside the formal settings of the 'old' educational institutions. There is not only conclusive evidence that the volume and level of recorded participation in formal adult leaning are increasing. There is also a growing, if not exploding market for non-formal forms of learning, such as fitness centres, sport clubs, self-help therapy manuals, internet learning, self-instructional video's, DVD's and CD's, etcetera. One of the most significant characteristics of this 'silent explosion' of learning (Field), is that the new learning is far more *individualistic* than it used to be. Field even argues that the content and purpose of adult learning has changed, in that 'new adult learners' are primarily struggling with *themselves*, i.e., with their body, their identity, and their relationships (Field 2000, p.49). The individualistic

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and individualised nature of the activities in which the new adult learners are engaged, is one of the most important reasons why the word 'learning' seems such an appropriate concept to use.

(4) The rise of 'learning' also has to do with larger socio-economic and political developments, especially in relation to the dismantling of the welfare state, which most often has happened for a combination of ideological (Thatcherism, Reaganism) and economic reasons (the 1973 oil crisis and the slowdown of the world economy in the last decades of the 20th century). One of the main ideas of the welfare state is that of the redistribution of wealth so that provisions such as health care, social security and education can be made available to all citizens. While much of this is still in place in many countries, the way in which the state approaches tax payers and tax payers approach the state has dramatically changed in that both of these increasingly define their relationship in economic terms. 'Value for money' has become the main principle in many of the exchanges between the state and its tax payers (formerly known as citizens). This way of thinking lies, for example, at the basis of the emergence of a culture of accountability in education together with ever-tighter systems of inspection, and ever-more prescriptive educational 'protocols' (of which a national curriculum is only a first step). It also is the logic behind voucher systems and the idea that parents, as the 'consumers' of the education of their children, should ultimately decide what should happen in the schools. This way of thinking, in other words, introduces a logic which focuses on those who are the users or consumers of the educational provision and the most suitable name for the consumer of education is, of course, 'learner.'

Against learning?

What is wrong with 'learning'? Is there a problem with the new language of learning? Could there be a reason for arguing *against* learning? I believe there is, provided that we keep in mind that the rise of 'learning' is the outcome of a range of only loosely connected and to a certain degree even contradictory developments, so that to argue against 'learning' in one respect or one situation does not necessarily imply an argument against all learning or learning in general -- if such a thing exists.

As I see it, the main problem with the new language of learning is that it allows for a redescription of the process of education in terms of an *economic exchange*, i.e., an exchange in which the learner is the (potential) consumer, the one who has certain 'needs,' and where the teacher, the educator, or the educational institution becomes the provider, i.e., the one who is there to meet the needs of the learner. This is the 'logic' which says that educational institutions and individual educators should be flexible, that they should respond to the needs of the learners, that they should give the learners 'value for money,' and perhaps even that they should operate on the principle that 'the customer is always right.' (This is, no doubt, the world of *learndirect*®, where "you don't need any experience," where computer-based learning shouldn't "bother you," and where "our friendly staff will be on hand to help you out.") It also is the 'logic' which implies that educators and educational institutions should be accountable, since what ultimately constitutes the relationship between learners and providers is the payment that the learner makes, either directly or, in the case of state-funded education, indirectly (viz., through taxes).

In one respect it does make sense to look at the process of education in these terms, at least, that is, in order to redress the imbalances of a situation in which education is mainly provider-led and inflexible. Accessibility to education has, after all, everything to do with such basic things as being able to attend school, college or university, and traditionally those groups who couldn't organise their lives around the requirements of educational institutions, were simply excluded from education. Hence the importance of evening classes, open universities, and flexibility more generally. In this respect it is clear that educational institutions and individual educators should respond to the 'needs' of the learners. To think of students as learners and of learners as customers can be a very helpful way to achieve precisely this.

But the more fundamental question is whether the educational process *itself* can be understood -- and should be understood -- in economic terms, i.e., as a situation in which the learner has certain needs and where it is the business of the educator to meet those needs. I believe, following Feinberg (2001), that this is not the case, and that it is for precisely this reason that the comparison between an economic and an educational transaction falls short. In the case of an economic transaction we can, in principle,[2] assume that the consumers know what their needs

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are and hence know what they want. Is this also a valid assumption in the case of education? It may seem that most parents know very well what they want from the school to which they send their children. But this is only true on a very general level (and may perhaps only be true because there are strong cultural expectation about why children should go to school and what to expect from schools and schooling). But most parents don't send their children to school with a detailed list of what they want the teacher to do (like: Dear Miss, Please give Mary 30 minutes of mathematics instruction using method A, followed by 15 minutes of remedial teaching, and after that please 20 minutes religious education, and a bit of interaction with the other children in her class as well, please). Parents send their children to school because they want them to be educated, but it is up to the professional judgement and expertise of the teacher to make decisions about what this particular child actually needs.[3] Here lies the fundamental difference between what Feinberg (2001) refers to as the 'market model' and the 'professional model.'

In market models consumers are supposed to know what they need, and producers bid in price and quality to satisfy them. In professional models the producer not only services a need, but also defines it and the professional body is supposed to maintain quality. Sam goes to his physician complaining of a headache. Is it an aspirin or brain surgery that he needs? Only the doctor knows. (Feinberg 2001, p.403)

Would this be different in the case of adult learners? Presumably not. Adults may on average have a better understanding of what their educational needs are than children, but not only are there many cases in which adults precisely engage in education in order to find out what it is that they 'really' want or need. We also shouldn't forget the many accounts of adults for whom engaging in education was a life-transforming experience (two classical examples are Willy Russell's *Educating Rita*, and, more problematic but not less real, G.B. Shaw's *Pygmalion*).

The main reason, therefore, for being against 'learning' -- that is, to be against a vocabulary in which education is construed in terms of 'meeting the needs of the learner' -- is that underlying assumption that learners come to the educational situation with a clear-cut understanding of what their needs are, is an invalid assumption. It both misconstrues the role of the educational

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professional and the role of the learner, and forgets that, unlike in the case of economic transactions, a major reason for engaging in education is to find out what one actually needs (both in the more 'technical' sense in which a teacher decides what is best for this individual child, and in the more general sense in which learners find out what they 'really' want through education). We could say, therefore, that to approach education in terms of 'meeting the needs of the learner' entails a misunderstanding of what education is.

In a sense it can also be argued, that the idea of meeting the needs of the learner entails a rather impoverished understanding of what learning itself is about. If the framework is one in which the only 'possible' question is about meeting the needs of the learner, then it only allows for technical questions to be asked, i.e., questions about the learning *process*, and not for the more important and more difficult questions about the content and purpose of learning.[4] On the one hand these questions become wholly individualised, because it is assumed that the learner already knows (and should know) what he or she wants to learn and why he or she wants to learn it.[5] On the other hand there is also a real danger that questions about the content and purpose of learning, since they are considered to be the 'business' of individual learners -- and not of the providers of learning -- become subject to the forces of the market, most importantly through advertising. In those cases learning simply becomes a commodity among others. It becomes a lifestyle option.

There may well be significant areas of learning in which it should indeed be up to the individual to decide about the content and purpose of his or her learning. My point here is not to say that only some learning should count as legitimate and respectable and other learning not. My point here rather is that questions about the content and purpose of learning should be part of the learning process itself -- they are, in other words, legitimate and important *educational* questions. I am, therefore, also saying that these questions should be seen as social and intersubjective questions, and not simply questions about individual preferences. Questions about who we are and who we want to become through learning, although of immense importance for ourselves, are always also questions about our relationships with others and about our place in the social fabric. On a wider scale, questions about the content and purpose of education are also fundamentally political questions. They are questions about what 'we,' as a

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society, believe that the content and purpose of the education for all members in a society should be. A democratic society is one in which there is a constant discussion about precisely these questions. To leave the answer to these questions to the forces of the market, deprives us of the opportunity to have a democratic say in the educational 'reproduction' of society.

My argument against 'learning' -- or to be more precise: my questioning of a line of thinking that is made possible through the 'new language of learning' -- not only has implications for the role and place of education in society. If education is *not* -- or not simply -- about meeting the needs of the learner, then this also raises the question how we then should understand the educational relationship, i.e., the interaction between the teacher and the student. What, in other words, constitutes an educational relationship?

From learning to education: Trust, violence and responsibility
I want to suggest that in order to develop an answer to this question -- and in this paper I can only give an outline of a possible answer -- we must reconfigure the educational relationship, the relationship between the individual who wants to learn and the provider of learning experiences, in terms of three interlocking concepts: trust, violence and responsibility or, to be more precise: 'trust without a ground,' 'transcendental violence,' and 'responsibility without knowledge.' Why these three concepts? Let me try to explain.

Where does education begin? It may, indeed, begin with a learner who wishes to learn something, who seeks knowledge, skills, qualifications, change, adventure... And who seeks a way to learn this and perhaps even someone to learn from. We can of course try to put this whole process in neat boxes. The learner knows what he wants to learn, so the provider must make sure that it is precisely that -- nothing more and nothing less - which the learner will learn. Hence learning contracts, hence accountability, hence inspection and control, and hence *learndirect*[*]: **"learndirect** is a brand new form of learning," **"learndirect** learning is designed with you, the individual learner in mind" (http://www.learndirect.co.uk/personal). However, even if one engages in neatly organised forms of learning, there is always a risk. Not only is there a risk that you won't learn what you wanted to learn (in which case you can always sue the provider). There is also the risk that you will learn things that you couldn't have imagined that

you would learn or would have wanted to learn. And there is the risk that you will learn something that you rather didn't want to learn -- for example something about yourself. If learning goes *beyond* the mere acquisition of information or of skills or competencies, if learning, in short, turns into education, then there is the risk that learning may change you. This means, that education only begins when the learner is willing to 'take' a risk. One way to express this, is to say that one of the constituents of the educational relationship and of education itself is *trust*. Why are risk and trust connected? Basically because trust is about those situations in which you do not know and cannot know what will happen. Trust is by its very definition without ground, because if one's trust were grounded, i.e., if you were able to know what will happen or how the person in which you put your trust will act and respond, trust is no longer needed. Trust would then have been replaced by calculation. Trust, however, is about what is *incalculable*. This is not to suggest, of course, that trust should be blind. It is only meant to highlight the fact that trust *structurally* (and not accidentally) entails a moment of risk.

What is learning? Psychologists, both of an individualistic and of a socio-cultural bent, may well try to explain how learning, or more precisely how the *process* of learning, takes place, for example in terms of changes in our brain cells or through legitimate peripheral participation. What lies behind these explanations is the idea that learning has to do with the *acquisition* of something 'external,' something which existed before the act of learning and which, as a result of learning, becomes the possession of the learner. This scheme is what we usually have in mind when we say that someone has learned something. But we can also look at learning from a slightly different angle, and see it as a 'response' to a 'question.' This shouldn't -- for the moment -- be taken too literally. Rather than seeing learning as the attempt to acquire, to master, to internalise, and what other 'possessive' metaphors we can think of, we can also see learning as a reaction to a 'disturbance,' as an attempt to reorganise or reintegrate as a result of 'disintegration.' Learning as responding to what is other or different, to what challenges, irritates and disturbs us, rather than as the acquisition of something that we want to possess. Both ways of looking at learning might be equally valid, depending, that is, on the situation in which we raise the question about the validity of a certain conception of learning. But the second definition is educationally the more significant, if it is conceded that in education we are first of all concerned with questions about subjectivity (or, in sociological terms, agency). While learning

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as acquisition is simply about getting more and more, learning as responding is about showing where you stand and who you are. It is about something which I have described elsewhere as 'coming into presence' (see Biesta, 1999). 'Coming into presence' is not something that individuals can do in and by themselves. This is first of all, because to come into presence is to come into presence in a *social* or *intersubjective* world, i.e., a world which we share with others *who are not like us* (see, e.g., Arendt, 1989). It also isn't something that we should understand as the act and decision of a pre-social 'ego.' This is first of all because it can be argued that the very 'structure' of our subjectivity is social. Even when we utter words like "I" or "I wish," we use a language that in a fundamental sense is not of our own (see Derrida, 1998). But it is also, and more importantly, because, as Emmanuel Levinas has tried to argue, because what 'makes' us into a unique, singular being -- me, and not you -- is precisely our responding to the other, to the question of the other, to the other as question (see Levinas, 1989; 1998). Levinas conceives of this responding as a responsibility (dare I say a 'response-ability'?) "*that is justified by no prior commitment*" (Levinas, 1989, p.92, emph. in original). It is, to put it differently, the non-ontological ontological position we find ourselves in. We cannot choose not to *be* responsible, although we are well able not to respond, i.e., to close our ears for the question. If there is anything to decide, it is *not* the decision to become responsible, but only the decision to deny our responsibility -- which implies, however, a denial of the opportunity to come into presence, to 'constitute' ourselves in our 'uniqueness' (Levinas, 1998). Along these lines we can think of education as the 'situation' (process, interaction) in which there is an opportunity to come into presence. This, in turn, implies that education -- or more precisely: educa*tors* -- should provide such opportunities.[6] But what does it mean to provide such opportunities? It means, of course, that students are able to respond, are able to show how they are and where they stand. It also means that there is an opportunity to hear questions. But I want to argue that this also implies that one of the most crucial tasks of the teacher is precisely that of making questions audible, and perhaps even posing or representing questions, including one of the most basic educational questions: "What do you think about it? (see Rancière, 1991, p.36; see also Masschelein, 1998, p.144; Biesta, 1998). It will be clear that 'coming into presence' is not necessarily a pleasant and easy process. One could even argue that it necessarily is an unpleasant and uneasy process. This is, I believe, what Derrida (1978) has in mind when, in responding to Levinas, he writes about the violence involved in 'coming into presence.' Derrida calls this

violence *transcendental* violence. It is violent in that it doesn't leave the subject alone, in that it asks difficult questions. But it is precisely through this that the subject, the individual as a unique, singular being can come into presence. It is, in other words, the condition of possibility of coming into presence -- hence *transcendental* violence. This is, of course, a far cry from the world of *learndirect*. It suggests that education is in a fundamental and structural sense a *difficult* process (see Biesta, in press) and that there is no way in which we can ever relieve ourselves of *this* difficulty.

If this is what constitutes an educational relationship and makes education possible, then it becomes immediately clear that teachers -- those who have the courage to teach -- carry an immense responsibility. This responsibility is more than a responsibility for the 'quality' of teaching or for successfully meeting the needs of the learner. That, so one could say, is only about accountability, which basically is an economic concept. If teaching is about creating opportunities for the student to come into presence, if it therefore is about asking 'difficult questions,' then it becomes clear that the first responsibility of the teacher is a responsibility for the *subjectivity* of the student, for that what allows the student to be a unique, singular being. Taking responsibility for the singularity of the student, for the uniqueness of this particular student, is not something that has to do with calculation. It rather belongs to the very structure of responsibility that we don't know what we 'take' responsibility for -- if 'taking' is the right word in the first place. Responsibility is *unlimited*, because a limited responsibility is just an excuse to credit oneself with good conscience (see Derrida, 1990, p.51). As Derrida explains:

> When the path is clear and given, when a certain knowledge opens up the way in advance, the decision is already made, it might as well be said that there is none to make; irresponsibly, and in good conscience, one simply applies or implements a program... It makes of action the applied consequence, the simple application of a knowledge or know-how. It makes of ethics and politics a technology. No longer of the order of practical reason or decision, it begins to be irresponsible. (Derrida, 1992, p.41, p.45)

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Responsibility *without* knowledge is, then, the third 'dimension' of the reconfiguration of the educational relationship. It is this dimension which makes the job of the teacher so difficult if, that is, he or she really engages with this responsibility and doesn't deny its existence.

It could be argued that the reconfiguration of the educational relationship in terms of trust, violence and responsibility that I have proposed is highly philosophical and highly theoretical and hence unlikely to be of any value for the practice of education. I believe, however, that this is not the case. I recently had the privilege to work with a group of teachers on questions about their educational 'values,' i.e., about what they found most important in their work, what motivated them, and what kept them going (see Biesta, Korthagen & Verkuyl, in press). Interestingly enough, all teachers who took part in the project came with stories about their concern for individual students, stories about the responsibility they felt, not for exam results or the efficiency of their students' learning, but first and foremost for who their students were and for what they might become. And all teachers knew that this is far from 'easy,' and that it indeed involves asking difficult questions.

Conclusions

In this paper I have outlined an argument 'against learning' and 'for education.' It may seem as if this paper is only about definitions, i.e., that it is about what defines 'learning' and what defines 'education.' In a sense this is true. I have tried to show how the word 'learning' is used in contemporary educational discourse, and I have tried to argue that instead of 'learning' we might better use 'education.' But what I have tried to make clear as well, is that it is the very language that we use to speak and write about education, which makes certain arguments and lines of thinking possible and, consequently, makes other arguments and lines of thinking far more difficult. The rules of the language game of 'learning' are different from the rules of the language game of 'education.' Or at least we can say that the two games are played differently. Precisely here lies the danger of the 'new language of learning,' in that it allows for a way to talk about education which basically misconstrues what education is about. It is for this reason that, as I have put it in the subtitle of this paper, I wish to reclaim 'education' in an age of 'learning.' To reclaim education, implies that we shouldn't forget that education is in a very fundamental and even structural sense a difficult process. I have explored the difficulty of education in terms of

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three interlocking concepts: trust (without ground), (transcendental) violence, and responsibility (without knowledge). I have suggested that there is some evidence to support the idea that what teachers really care about can indeed be captured in terms of these three concepts. It might even be the case that the very encounter with individual learners -- by this I mean real people, not those who are logged in on a virtual learning environment -- may elicit such a perspective and such a way of thinking as I have developed in this paper. But perhaps I am too optimistic. Perhaps the new language of learning has already produced the new teacher, the new learning manager, the new administer of this 'brand new form of learning' called *learndirect*®. If that would be then case, then I want to declare myself right here and right now unconditionally against learning.

Notes

1. Another sign of this shift is the fact that 'identity' (which is basically a psychological and sociological concept) has become much more central in educational discourse, while hardly anyone anymore speaks about the 'educated person' (see Edwards 1997, p.77).

2. It could be argued, of course, that modern consumers may think that they know what they want or need, but that most of the time this is only because of effective advertising strategies. Do I really want/need a DVD-player? Although, therefore, there is the issue of the manufacturing of needs and wants, I do think that there does remain a fundamental difference between economic and educational 'exchanges.'

3. I am aware that this account is slightly romantic, especially in relation to the day-to-day practice of many teachers who have to work under a very prescriptive educational 'regime.'

4. Interestingly enough, neither the new psychology of learning nor the new learning market (where the 'silent explosion' is taking place) are able to provide an answer to this question. Since the traditional (i.e., modern) legitimisation of education is also no longer self-evident, the question about the content and even more the purpose of education seems to be an extremely urgent one in the current 'age of learning.'

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5. This does, of course, raise problems in those situations in which governments might think that people need to learn more (e.g., to update their skills so that they remain employable or so that the country as a whole can compete in the global economy, a central motivation in the current discourse on lifelong learning; see, e.g., Coffield, 2000), but where individuals don't feel the same need. This is where 'driving up demand' -- a phrase used by the UK Department for Education and Employment (1999, pp.55-56, quoted in Field, 2000, p.28) -- becomes an issue!

6. This is another reason why the economic metaphor is not suitable (and perhaps even dangerous) for understanding educational interaction, since it could be argued that the very point of being a consumer or customer is precisely to fit smoothly into the economic exchange system. Economic transactions don't provide opportunities for 'coming into presence.' This might also be why capitalism is such a problematic thing, since what capitalism needs mostly are consumers, not subjects, not unique, singular responding beings. Capitalism only needs 'dedicated followers of fashion.' In this respect see also Peter McLaren's educational critique of capitalism (McLaren, 1997).

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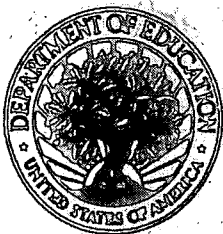
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