

Reorienting Cosmo-Global Education: The OECD, Derrida, and the Hospitality of Thinking

Emma Williams*

*The recent introduction by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development of the notion of ‘global competence’ appears to install cosmopolitan understanding at the heart of education across the globe. Yet how far does the OECD notion, and the broader models of global education it means to stand for, consolidate a picture that fails to do justice to the complex nature of human interpersonal and intercultural ethics? In this paper, I draw out limitations in the OECD notion of global competence and its recommendations for educational practice. Through an exploration of Jacques Derrida’s thinking on the theme of hospitality, I try to give substance to the critical destabilisation of the philosophical assumptions on which the OECD picture depends. Existing attempts to utilise Derrida’s philosophy in relation to questions of politics and education can rely on sensational language to do too much of the argumentative work. I approach Derrida’s thinking on hospitality via certain narratives, including scenes from Nobel Prize-winning novelist J.M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians*. I then consider Derrida’s painstaking consideration of the nature of our lives in language to further develop the idea that hospitality involves a displacement of the self. These lines of thought, I conclude, suggest alternative possibilities for political education to those currently recognised in predominant discourses. They reveal how practices of writing, reading, and study in the humanities can provide a richer and more robust means of developing the receptivity of thinking called for by cosmo-global education.*

‘Is not hospitality an interruption of the self?’ (Derrida, 1991, p. 51)

Keywords: Global competence; OECD; Derrida; Hospitality; Literature

* Centre for Education Studies, University of Warwick, United Kingdom
e-mail: E.Williams.1@warwick.ac.uk

The rise of cosmo-global education

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) recently announced that, from 2018, the notion of ‘global competence’ would be introduced as an additional measure in its programme for international student assessment (PISA). ‘Global competence’ is now to be ranked alongside literacy, mathematics and science as part of the ‘foundational knowledge and skills’ that are ‘preparing our youth for an inclusive and sustainable world’ (p. 1).

‘Global competence’ is defined by the OECD as a ‘global and intercultural outlook’ (p. 3). It is a capacity through which young people will learn how to ‘participate in and appreciate’, and ‘benefit from cultural differences’ (p. 3). It is also ‘the capacity to examine local, global and intercultural issues, to understand and appreciate the perspectives and world views of others, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development’ (p. 7). As should be clear from these characterisations, the notion invokes, in no small way, a conception of cosmopolitanism. In philosophical terms, conceptions of cosmopolitanism have been explored and discussed at least since the Stoics, and continued through the Enlightenment philosophy of Immanuel Kant and, in the 20th Century, the post-structuralist thinking of Jacques Derrida. The discursive fields of ‘global citizenship’, ‘education for democratic citizenship’, and ‘intercultural education’ that have arisen in education in recent years invite a reconsideration of these philosophical debates, concerned as they are with preparation for the life of the *polis* and the *cosmopolis*. Yet how far does the OECD notion, and the broader models of global education it means to stand for, do justice to the complex nature of human interpersonal and intercultural encounters as implicated in the philosophical debates?

In this paper, I seek to draw out certain limitations in the OECD notion of global competence and its recommendations for educational practice. Through an exploration of Jacques Derrida’s thinking on the theme of hospitality, I try to give substance to the critical destabilisation of the philosophical assumptions upon which the OECD picture depends. Existing attempts to utilise Derrida’s philosophy in relation to questions of politics and education can rely on sensational language to do too much of the explanatory work. I approach Derrida’s thinking on hospitality via certain narratives, including a consideration of scenes from Nobel Prize-winning novelist J.M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians*. I then consider Derrida’s painstaking consideration of the nature of our lives in language to further reveal the idea that hospitality involves a displacement of the self. These lines of thought, I conclude, show alternative possibilities for political education to those currently recognised in predominant discourses. They reveal how practices of writing, reading, and study in the humanities can provide a richer and more robust means of developing the receptivity of thinking called for by cosmo-global education.

Reconsidering competence

Let us resume our reflection on the OECD document and the presentation of global competence found therein. Now, as well as ‘building on’ predominant models of global education, the OECD also presents global competence as a means of rationalising the different

models and unifying them together. They state, for example, that global competence will clarify the ‘conceptual foundations’ of global education (p. 7). This will be further aided by the introduction of a shared means of assessment – a standardized measure of students’ performance in global competence across all membership countries from 2018 (including Japan and the UK).

But what actually is meant by ‘global competence’? Notably, the OECD differentiates competence from ‘merely a specific skill’ (p. 7). This is not insignificant, of course, since ‘skills talk’ has been rampant in educational discourse for at least the past three decades (see Barrow 1987). During the 1990s, the discussion of skills was itself closely followed by talk of competences such as ‘competence-based’ education and training (for discussion, Hyland 1997). Yet the appropriations of both skills and competences have been widely criticised, on account of their technicist and functionalist implications. It has been argued, moreover, that educators and policy makers promote an overly reductive sense of ‘skill’, which takes it to consist in a narrow bunch of knacks or techniques applied invariably across domains. In this sense, what is happening with ‘skills talk’ appears to testify to a wider proceduralism of education, which is itself nihilistic (see Standish, 1992).

The educational uses of ‘skills’ distorts and covers over the richer senses invoked in the Northern European term (see Winch, 2008). What of the origins of the term ‘competence’? A general definition of ‘competence’ suggests ‘sufficiency of qualification’ or ‘a capacity to deal adequately with a subject.’ The English word traces back to *competentia*, which connotes a sense of meeting together, agreement, and symmetry. Competence has Latin roots, and mentalistic and intellectual connotations. The emphasis thus seems to be on a cerebral possession – perhaps something one then goes on to demonstrate in practice. It is significant, in light of this, that global competence will be measured via a *cognitive* assessment.

What does global competence actually amount to? The OECD claims that ‘developing a global and intercultural outlook is a lifelong process; there is no stage at which one becomes fully globally competent’ (p. 4). So is global competence a regulative idea? Is it utopian? We are not provided with the answer in the OECD document. Nevertheless, the OECD offers us a number of examples that help to demonstrate their ideas (or ideals?). The following scenario, for example, is used to illustrate competence in ‘understanding perspectives and world-views’:

A student notices that certain members of his class have stopped eating lunch. When he enquires, they tell him that they are participating in a religious fast. The student is curious and asks more about what that involves: for how long will they fast? When can they eat? What can they eat? What is the religious significance of the fast? The student learns that for his classmates fasting is something that they do every year, along with their families and religious community. He also learns that fasting is significant to his classmates as for them it is a way of demonstrating control over their bodies. The student reflects on this significance. Although he does not fast he recognises that the themes of community, sacrifice and material transcendence are common to many different religions, including that of his own religious heritage. He recognises that different groups can attribute the same meaning to different practices. He furthermore asks his classmates whether he can fast with them for a day, as a way of experiencing what fasting means for them. His classmates warmly agree and invite him to join their families

for dinner in the evening to break the fast together. Although the student does not attribute the same significance to fasting, through this experience he better understands the perspectives of his classmates and his respect or religious diversity increases. (p. 10).

What can we make of this example? As I suggested in the introduction, Jacques Derrida's thinking on the theme of hospitality works to disrupt and challenge certain assumptions that appear to underpin the OECD notion of global competence – and the model of cosmo-global education it enshrines. We are still some way from seeing how or why this will work. Interestingly, however, the example just given moves us forward in certain respects – for the narrative of the OECD example itself begins with sharing a meal, and ends with a visit to a home. In the predominant discourses of cosmo-global education, it seems, notions of hospitality have quickly made an appearance. Do we start to glimpse why the notion of hospitality could be an important one to consider?

The welcome industry

Yet there are certain problems with even invoking the notion of hospitality today, and it is worth registering these before going any further. This is because the term is apt to be understood in terms of the 'hospitality industry.' Picture, for example, a 'welcome event' attended as part of an international academic conference. Here are decorations themed in the host nation colours. There go some delicacies from the host nation. Later, we will have some traditional entertainment. Such events are enjoyable and offer a 'warm welcome' – in a sense. Yet the underlying structure appears to operate according to a logic of marketing. This comment could be taken as being a little sweeping. Yet the word 'event' I conjoined to 'welcome' in the phrase above should give us some clue that the type of welcome practices I am referring to here are welcomes that have been carefully orchestrated according to a pre-defined protocol as to how things should be done. Indeed, it may be that the welcome event follows a kind of blueprint that is replicated across different countries, with the relevant specificities altered. All this smacks of marketing, and in a way that makes the welcoming practices into something of a performance (and there is likely to be an events coordinator who will be able to advise the relevant people on how a welcome event should be conducted). Hospitality, I would suggest, is hereby made into a kind of kitsch. Think, in a similar vein, of the 'welcome pack' we receive upon completing a purchase with a new company. This is something designed to bring us into the fold and, presumably, retain our loyalty to the brand in order to increase the profits of the company.

Derrida's thinking on hospitality moves in a different direction to marketised hospitality, however. Derrida's thinking is an attempt to retrieve something in the term that has been repressed and lost. And it this shows up certain limitations in the image of hospitality and interpersonal and intercultural ethics presented by the OECD. Let us now start to look at this more fully.

Addressing Derrida

One way into Derrida's thinking here is to consider the question of limits: does hospitality extend to everyone, or does it have fixed boundaries? Integral to Derrida's consideration of hospitality is a distinction he draws between a kind of welcoming of the other that *is* limited and bounded in some way (what is called 'conditional' hospitality), and a welcome that goes in *excess* of these limits (which is 'unconditional'). Yet what precisely is at stake here? As Derek Attridge asks:

If a stranger knocks at my door and, seeing he is tired, I let him come in and sit down, am I participating in the infinite? Could my hospitality be called unconditional? What if he makes his way to my kitchen and starts helping himself to food in the fridge – aren't I likely to impose some conditions at this point? How does Derrida's idea of an infinite hospitality without conditions relate to our dealings with one another in the real world? (2016, p. 284).

Attridge here draws attention to the way that Derrida's thinking at times attracts scepticism, even scandal. This is in part because, as Attridge suggests here, Derrida's talk of the 'unconditional' (not least the 'infinite') can make it seem as though his discussion of hospitality is only concerned with only extraordinary or extreme situations. On this view, Derrida's concerns look to be far removed from the everyday world – including that of education. The example attempted by the OECD, by contrast, looks more concrete, more practical.

I should like to challenge these ways of thinking about Derrida's philosophy (and about the OECD). Yet I am working up to my claims slowly. Part of the reason for this is that there are limitations in some of the ways Derrida's thinking is utilised in relation to educational and political themes. Consider, for example, Michael Peters and Gert Biesta's attempt to defend the political dimensions of Derrida's philosophy, in which they state:

We have never been able to understand the claim made periodically over the last thirty years ... that Jacques Derrida is not "political" or that deconstruction is agnostic, politically speaking. In our view Derrida is not only a political philosopher but perhaps even the most political of all contemporary philosophers. How can it be that such claims have been made against a philosopher who has been responsible for unhinging Western metaphysics and instating a generalised critique of the Western 'ideology' of presence? How can those who wish for a social democratic politics ignore "the political" in Derrida's critique of "logocentrism" and "phallogentrism"? (2008, p. 6).

Now, I certainly sympathise with Biesta and Peters' frustrations about philosophers who dismiss Derrida's philosophy as obscurantist and relativistic. However, I would not put matters quite as they do here. Part of the concern is that their claims can sound a little defensive and can obscure the way that, on one level, it is quite understandable 'how it can be' that the political implications of Derrida's philosophy have not been recognised. Indeed, Derrida was himself resistant to the category of 'political thinker' – in much the same way as he was resistant to the notion of 'ethics.' This is in part due to the predominant ways in which 'politics' and 'ethics' are conceived as bounded and separable areas of human lives – and due to the prevalence of certain assumptions about the human being that prevail in moral and political philosophy.

I am perhaps being a little unfair to Biesta and Peters. If we look beyond the introduction to their volume, we find more developed discussions of Derrida's thinking. These discussions make much of what Biesta calls Derrida's notion of 'openness to the other': 'a concern for the other ... or to be more precise, the concern for the unforeseeable incoming of the other, for the promise of the other' (p. 10). It would not be wrong to think that such ideas are linked to the conception of hospitality we are approaching in this paper. Yet let us look at Biesta's explanation of the way Derrida's 'concern for the other' links to 'several deconstructive themes':

Although we might say, like Derrida, that the deconstruction of logocentrism is a search for 'the other of language' ... deconstruction is not exclusively or primarily concerned with a linguistic problematic. The question of alterity is first and foremost a question of the concrete other, of, 'the other' which is beyond language' ... It is for precisely this reason, that we can say that deconstruction is not a negative but rather an *affirmative* 'philosophy', that it is not a nihilistic 'enclosure in nothingness' but rather an 'openness towards the other.' At this point it becomes clear how closely Derrida's writing is connected to the writing of Emmanuel Levinas, whose work stands out as an unprecedented attempt in twentieth century philosophy to articulate what it means to do justice to the other as what the other is, namely: other ... if the other is always thought as an instance of something more general and as a result of the ego's act of conceptualisation it can never appear in its 'radical alterity', it can never appear as 'absolutely other' as unique and irreducible *singular*; it can never appear as what it is, namely: other. (1998, p. 404-405)

Education, Biesta continues, should 'recognise the singularity of the other.' He claims this does not mean 'neglecting' the other – for this would 'leave the other in its otherness', and would be an act of 'transcendental violence' (p. 408). Nevertheless, as Biesta goes on to note, recognition of the other 'can never be merely positive.' The very act of recognition is 'at the same time necessary and violent' (p. 408). Thus, he states, 'the conclusion can only be that the possibility of just education is always sustained by impossibility.'

Do we have reason to be hesitant over following Biesta's reading of Derrida here? My question is not whether Biesta has understood Derrida adequately. Rather, it involves raising a concern over a somewhat excessive focus on particular linguistic phrases – especially those concerning 'the other'; 'the otherness of the other'; and 'openness to the other.' Do these phrases risk becoming exculpatory, and taking the place of a more patient thinking through of what is at stake in Derrida's thinking? The sensationalism of the language may work to muffle the more nuanced thought towards which Biesta is reaching.¹ Let us see if we can speak in a different register.

Narratives of hospitality

I should like at this point to return us to the story from the OECD and attend to some of its features a little more closely. The structure of the interpersonal and intercultural encounter presented here is, from the outset, one of 'enquiry.' A student 'notices' that some members of his class have stopped eating lunch and is 'curious.' The conversation that re-

sults is presented as a series of direct questions concerning the length, practicalities, and significance of the fasting. These look almost like the research questions of an empirical project – even questions posed in an interrogation. But let us consider further. The student character is then depicted as learning a series of points (we may call them ‘propositions’) as a result of his enquiry. The implicit assumption is of the possibility of easy answers to his questions. Yet the content of what is being talked about are complex notions of ‘community’, ‘sacrifice’ and ‘material transcendence’. We are apparently to infer that the fasting students were able to articulate these notions in ways that could be readily available, taken up, and understood by the enquirer. The student character ‘recognises’ the answers given by his classmates in terms of prior knowledge about his own religion. The identity of the characters involved are all portrayed as fully formed, clearly defined and self-contained. The direction of the student’s enquiry is outward-facing throughout – no questions are turned upon himself.

Then there is an unexpected turn. The student asks his classmates if he can fast with them and experience what it is like to fast. It is not clear from the narrative how or for what reason the student decides to take this step. Neither are we given a sense of why the classmates ‘warmly agree’, or why they further take the remarkable step of inviting him back to their homes to break the fast in the evening. Does the student attend the meal? What happens at the meal? What kinds of conversation take place? We are not told. The narrative here reaches an abrupt end, with the declaration that the student’s ‘respect or religious diversity increases’.

Perhaps it may be objected that we are being unfair in our reading. The genre of the piece under consideration is, after all, not a work of literature: we should not expect *War and Peace* from the OECD. But are the elisions in the narrative so easily explained? Or might they testify to something more – perhaps an essential lack of interest and attention to how the important moves might actually happen and what they might involve or amount to. The moral of the OECD story appears to be that we should be more curious. It is somewhat ironic, then, that the model provided to generate that understanding itself appears so incurious at crucial points. But the problem also cuts deeper. For this lack of attention seems to work hand in glove with the reinforcement of simplistic, binary oppositions that can be seen throughout the piece: between ‘one’ culture and another; between self and other; between the public (school) and the private (home); between subject and object; knower and known. This gives a facile, superficial and gestural quality to the whole example.

As I flippantly noted, we can hardly expect *War and Peace* from the OECD. Yet the possible relation between the scenario above and more developed fictional writing does bear some further consideration. I propose to do this here in relation to a contemporary novel in which the principles and practices under consideration in the OECD document are also raised. Of course, it might be asked why offering glimpses into a work of fiction is relevant at this stage – does it not distract from the ‘real world’ issues under discussion and from the elaboration of Derrida’s account of hospitality I have promised? Yet this question fails to recognise the interconnection between fiction and human lives. More specifically, it fails to recognise the way that literature turns our attention to concrete particularities of human life, in all its richness and complexity.² Moreover, and as I hope to show, the examples from literature can help us to understand what is at stake in Derrida’s philosophy. Let us now turn to see this more fully.

South African writer J. M. Coetzee’s fiction has been much discussed in terms of its po-

litical dimensions, including themes of hospitality. One novel in which such themes are explored is *Waiting for the Barbarians*. The narrative, which charts an undetermined year in an undetermined Empire, is set in an unnamed outpost in an unspecified place and time. On the fringes of the outpost live barbarian tribes who occasionally visit towns to trade or in search of medicine. The novel begins with a confrontation between Colonel Joll, a member of the Empire's secret police, and the Magistrate of the outpost, whose name we do not learn. Joll falsely perpetuates the myth that the barbarians are preparing a revolution and leads an expedition that eventually captures a group of prisoners. They are brought back to the compound and interrogated and tortured, and then released. The narrative unfolds from the perspective of the Magistrate, who remains in the regime, but at the same time appears to be living through a crisis of conscience. Yet things are not straightforward here and, as Derek Attridge points out, Coetzee's novel is 'drawing us into unfamiliar emotional and cognitive territory' (2004, p. 43).

Let us consider an aspect of this as regards the Magistrate's developing relationship to a barbarian girl. The girl was one of the original prisoners captured by Joll and she has been blinded by her torturers. She is left behind by the barbarian tribe when they are freed. The Magistrate finds her begging in the town and brings her back to his apartment:

The fire is lit. I draw the curtains, light the lamp. She refuses the stool, but yields up her sticks and kneels in the centre of the carpet.

'This is not what you think it is', I say. The words come reluctantly. Can I really be about to excuse myself? Her lips are clenched shut, her ears too no doubt, she wants nothing of old men and their bleating consciences. I prowls around her, talking about our vagrancy ordinances, sick at myself. Her skin begins to glow in the warm of the closed room. She tugs at her coat, opens her throat to the fire. The distance between myself and her torturers, I realise, is negligible; I shudder.

'Show me your feet,' I say in a new thick voice that seems to be mine. 'Show me what they have done to your feet.' (Coetzee, 2004, pp. 27-28).

The Magistrate's 'This is not what you think it is' are on one level clichéd claims of the seducer. But is that all he is? The Magistrate does desire the barbarian girl. Significantly, however, the scene does not end with the Magistrate having sex with the girl. Rather, he washes her feet. The relationship continues in to develop in much the same vein, as the Magistrate starts to bandage the girl's torture wounds and anoint her body with oils. The girl is impassive and mute throughout these episodes: her own feelings about what is happening remain inaccessible. The story develops with the Magistrate feeling increasingly compelled to return the girl to the barbarian tribe who have left her behind. His doing so finds him accused of treachery and, like the captured barbarians, he is interrogated and tortured by Joll.

One of the most significant aspects of the Magistrate's developing relationship with the girl is that it is not something the Magistrate actively determines or wills to happen. On the contrary, the reasons why the Magistrate comes to do what he does for the girl are unrecognisable and obscure, even incomprehensible. Mike Marais, in his reading of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, highlights this point by stating that the Magistrate is 'unsettled, unhomed, by his uninvited visitor' (2009, p. 28). The Magistrate says at one point that he is 'enslaved' to the girl (Coetzee, 2004, p. 42). In this way, this increasing yet incomprehensible sense of responsibility towards the girl seems to go along with a displacement of the self. The Magistrate

hears a ‘new thick voice that seems to be [his].’ His thoughts, his words, his desires no longer seem to be things that are fully under his control. Something else has broken in:

If a change in my moral being were occurring I would feel it [...]. I am the same man I always was; but time has broken, something has fallen in upon me from the sky, at random, from nowhere: this body in my bed, for which I am responsible, or so it seems, otherwise why do I keep it? For the time being, perhaps forever, I am simply bewildered. (p. 43).³

Earlier in the paper, I introduced Derrida’s notion of ‘unconditional hospitality’ and the question of whether hospitality should be something that has limits. As I also stated earlier, there is reason to be cautious about how we approach such thoughts. Yet on the basis of what we have seen from Coetzee, are we in a position to move a little closer to Derrida’s idea? The OECD example presents hospitality as something limited – and the interpersonal and intercultural relations involved here are premised on a containment of the self and an assumed binary between self and other. Does the Magistrate’s relation with the barbarian girl in Coetzee’s novel point us in a different direction? Does it, more specifically, suggest the thought of the unlimited or ‘unconditional’ sense of hospitality? Let us turn to Derrida’s own thinking to explore these lines of thought further.

Receiving and responding

In his seminar ‘Foreigner Question: Coming from Abroad’⁴, Derrida begins by drawing a distinction between ‘*the* question of the foreigner’ and ‘the question *of* the foreigner.’ Derrida asks us to consider: does this seemingly small difference in language and accent impact the ways we think about the issue of hospitality? In the first formulation the question of the foreigner or stranger is posed as a problem of enquiry and a program of research. We might recall the kind of approach demonstrated by the OECD’s enquiring student. Yet the second formulation suggests something different: ‘it is as though the foreigner were first of all *the one who* puts the first question, or *the one to whom* you address the first question’ (2000, p. 3, italics in the original). That is, it speaks of a prior relation that is the condition for the enquiring question to occur in the first place; ‘the question *of* the foreigner’ speaks of ‘the one who, putting the first question, puts me in question’ (p. 3).

Perhaps we are already moving too quickly. Let us approach these thoughts again from another direction – this time Derrida’s tracing of the shared etymology of the terms host and guest. In a different text, Derrida reflects on the ambivalence that is already implicated in the French term *hôte* as a result:

the *hôte* who receives (the host), the one who welcomes the invited or received *hôte* (the guest), the welcoming *hôte* who considers himself the owner of the place, is in truth a *hôte* received in his own home ... The *hôte* as host is a guest ... The one who welcomes is first welcomed in his own home. The one who invites is invited by the one whom he invites (1999, pp. 41-42).

One way into the thoughts being suggested here is to think of the dynamics of an act of welcoming. It is clear that, on one level, welcoming depends on something I intentionally *do*

(in English culture, perhaps, offering the guest a cup of tea). Yet is this active dimension the end of the matter? Consider a situation in which we are ostensibly ‘welcomed’ but in a way that feels heavy-handed or laboured: the awkward handshake, or too-loudly voiced ‘hello!’ The welcome here feels performative or gestural. Derrida’s thinking helps to draw attention to why this might be the case. This connects to a quieter dimension involved in welcoming. Rather than being active, this is more akin to a passivity, wherein the one welcoming becomes open to what the person being welcomed requires from me. Another way of putting this is to say that it is a matter of being held by the other, being at their call. Hence to be a host is always already to also be a guest, to invite is always already to be invited. This is not something that is to be understood in pathological terms; rather it is a matter of answering to what it is to be human.

Earlier, we noted how the notion of ‘unconditional hospitality’ may make it sound as though Derrida is only interested in extraordinary or extreme situations. But our summary of Derrida’s thinking has quickly brought us to say something more general about the human condition. Certainly, such claims may sound scandalous. This is, not least, because they have emerged largely as a result of following through the ambivalence of a word (and a word in a certain language, for the double meaning Derrida discusses is more accessible in the French term *hôte* than in English term ‘hospitality’). It is worth registering the scandal. Moreover, it is worth asking, why we are scandalised. In being so, are we distorting or repressing the role of language in human life?

Derrida’s philosophy is characterised by its painstaking attentiveness to language, and the ways language opens and closes down thinking. For Derrida, words do not stand in a one-to-one relation to thoughts that have been preformed in the head, neither does it merely label or communicate meaning that is pre-constituted in the world.⁵ Derrida argues that words are only possible – they can only function *as* words in the first place – insofar as they have the capacity to be circulated and put to use in new and different contexts. Words are, structurally, and not just contingently, repeatable and available for use elsewhere. At least two consequences follow from this, which help to further substantiate the thoughts about unconditional hospitality that we were approaching above.

The first is that the words I speak and that are mine are also, in an essential sense, *not* my own. Words come to me already laden with a past and with origins that I cannot know. My words, as Derrida puts it, are ‘inherited’: they carry the traces of pre-existing meanings and conventions for use. This helps to explain the sense in which, for Derrida, our relation to language is not one of mastery or full possession. Language, as Derrida puts it, ‘is there before us, it is older than us, its law precedes us’ (2005, p. 104). The human being always already begins in response – not because we *will* to respond, but because responsiveness is the condition of possibility of language and our lives in language.

A second consequence is that the words we use are forever open to future connotations we cannot entirely fathom. That is, there is a ‘projective’ nature to words, and the public circulation of signs means that they are always open to new possibilities and contexts. Language, as Derrida also puts it, ‘invents’. With this notion, we are returned to the theme of the ‘incoming of the other’ that, as we saw earlier, is stressed in Biesta. Yet now we are perhaps in a position to see more fully how Biesta’s somewhat sensationalist language might muffle the more nuanced thought that Derrida is reaching towards. For what is crucial here is that the invention of and by the other is not something that happens to me – least of all

something done *by* me. Rather, the invention is dependent upon a displacement of the self, which is the result of the way that, in language, we are always already broken open by the other. Language is inventive, it is creative, it is the source of new possibilities – but we must be ready to receive.

Do we glimpse here another way of thinking about hospitality, and one that might open new possibilities for how we understand cosmo-global education?

From limited to open hospitality

Global competence models are centred on a model of a self who gains knowledge of what is perceived to be different or foreign, and who then uses this knowledge as a basis to manifest ‘successfully applied’ skills and dispositions in intercultural and interpersonal encounters. Such a model depends on a sense of the ‘subject’ as a self-contained agent, detached from the world, whose thinking is autonomously directed. It depends on a sense that interpersonal and intercultural ethics is something that we can opt into (or out of): we decide to gain information about different cultures, choose to exercise our interpersonal skills. Moreover, it is something that can be measured and there are fixed criteria that can be performed and satisfied. The quality assessment approach inherently there in the PISA introduction of global competence provides a sense of security and certainty to interpersonal and intercultural ethics. It allows us the sense that we have discharged our duty, fulfilled our obligations.

How would matters look different from a Derridean perspective? As we saw above, through Derrida’s thinking we come to the idea of human existence as that which is always already broken open. This is to be understood in light of Derrida’s painstaking consideration of the nature of our lives in language. A key upshot is that interpersonal and intercultural ethics cannot be seen as a matter I opt into. Rather, ethics has always already happened. On this view, the OECD notion of global competence discourse always comes too late. Moreover, it threatens to repress the depth to which our responsibility to the other goes. If, as Derrida’s account of language suggests, the human being is mediated, open, riven, the choice is not between being hospitable or not. It is rather about taking *responsibility* for hospitality. That is, it is a matter of living in such a way that I am open to what is beyond myself (there is a necessity of being in *response* embedded within the term ‘responsibility’).

Global competence models, with their quality assessment approach, provide one with an alibi for hospitality; they allow us to retreat into formalised criteria. On a Derridean perspective, while criteria, conditions, laws and limits are also necessary parts of human life, their structure is such that they are always open to criticism and revision. This is why Derrida’s thinking makes much of the phrase ‘to come’ when exploring political notions. A Derridean perspective requires a constant negotiation and transaction between what we have in place and what it would be to do justice in a particular situation. This reveals the shakier and more demanding space in which we live our lives, including our interpersonal and intercultural encounters. This sense of the fragility in human life is repressed in current predominant models of cosmo-global education.

Receptivity and the humanities

In the course of this paper, I have made reference to two novels. My reference to *War and Peace* was somewhat flippant. This is because I used it as a conventional exemplar and convenient reference point (Tolstoy's work is stock example of a long and heavy work of fiction). Yet as I developed my argument, I also had recourse to a work that engaged my attention more directly. I drew on certain scenes within J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, and considered how these might be taken to stage the development of responsibility that goes along with a displacement of the self. Fiction is no longer 'high culture.' My recourse to fiction was at the heart of my thinking about how the OECD example and the style of thought that it enables are counterproductive for the very hospitality they ostensibly seek.⁶

Thinking further along these lines shows us the importance of literature in relation to the kinds of hospitality of thought that we have been approaching in this paper. Indeed, it might be said that reading fiction is itself a practice in what Derrida means by hospitality.⁷ For part of what happens when we read (if we are reading well) is that we allow the work to do something with us. This has to do with a certain kind of letting be: what Heidegger calls *Gelassenheit*. To read is not to rush to impose on the work a fixed set or norms, or analyse it in terms of received theories or habitual associations. Rather it is a matter of allowing the work to show forth in its own right – to welcome and receive the appeal of the work. Without this, I foreclose the possibilities of thinking that reading would otherwise enable. The opening of these possibilities is not something I do or actively achieve. However, it is not simply a matter of being *passive* either. In fact, we are here moving beyond the activity/passivity binary and the corresponding conception of the subject it enshrines.

Japanese art and aesthetics connects with such notions. In a recent discussion, Shoko Suzuki explores Kitaro Nishida's thinking in relation to J.F. Herbart. In particular, Suzuki considers Herbart's notion of *Takt* and musical talent in ways that connect to the rhythmical grasping of the object (2012, p. 49). Suzuki suggests Nishida's notion of 'pure experience', which involves 'moments of intense concentration and heightened stimulation' can help to illuminate this notion (p. 51). Examples are given of the pianist playing a recital, but the idea also extends to what happens in physical training and physical movements. Crucially, these experiences are seen to contain a point at which 'consciousness and sense of self is lost', and which is no longer a matter of doing something according to a set of patterns. As Suzuki notes, Nishida 'focused on the metaphor of an artist falling into the premitotic state of a seed during the process of creation' (p. 51). This is a moment in which an unassuming naturalness takes over: there is a 'direct knowledge' of a 'not-yet-divided subject-and-object (*shukyakumibun*)' (p. 52). Suzuki's discussion links this to Nishida's more general 'conceiving the human being not as a static being but rather as a dynamic being that moves in the midst of an interactive and constantly changing environment' (p. 42). This is set against the epistemological division of subject and object.⁸

Is there, accordingly, already space for the kinds of hospitality of thought we have been approaching in this paper within Japanese aesthetics? Perhaps it can be said that Japanese culture acknowledges a sense of receptivity that cuts far deeper and is more persuasive than what is typically managed by the West. It is worth reflecting at this point on how odd it would sound (even in English) to talk of aesthetic practices such as painting and drawing in terms of 'competences.' Receptivity is the very conditions of aesthetic experience – it is not

merely a decorative extra, and without this the experience is not what it is or what it can be.

I have spoken about literature and art, what of political education? Note that the receptive modes of thinking I have been discussing above are not merely *incidental* aspects of aesthetic judgement and aesthetic education. On the contrary, they are internally related to the possibilities of aesthetic judgement itself: for without such openness and readiness for response, aesthetic judgement itself is *void* (consider the student who has not read a Shakespeare text for themselves, but simply parrots lines from a study guide). Can we move from aesthetic judgement, which depends on and is constituted by receptive ways of thinking, to political judgement? Does aesthetic education model political education? Certainly it will be difficult to understand the reason for suggesting this so long as we conceive of political education in terms of fixed skills to be acquired and performed. Yet we might reflect here on the way that democracy is something that depends on, and is constituted by, the voices of its members. Part of what this involves is an exercise in expressing oneself and in trying to find out how the words sound as one articulates them and as others respond. This takes us towards a sense of the political not merely as a matter of considering what makes a good society in the abstract, but as what is in fact *necessary* for me. As we have seen earlier in this paper, in Derridean terms I am always already broken open, I find *myself* in relation to the other. Aesthetic judgement, if done rightly, will be an exercise in speaking for oneself, in trying to find out where one is in relation to a work, in seeing how the words sound as one articulates them and as others respond. Similarly, we might say, political education is a matter of finding oneself in and through making a contribution to the conversation in which we are all engaged, thereby in finding good ways to live together. Political education, in this sense, is not only a matter of considering particular questions or concepts. And education for democracy is not achieved simply by tacking on lessons in ‘global competence’ into an already squeezed curriculum. The political, rather, goes ‘all the way down’. It is the very condition of our individual existence, and it extends into the things we say and do with each other every day, and to the ways we think.

Conclusion

Unlike competencies, these forms of political education cannot be reckoned up according to the PISA scale. It takes us off the scale. For this reason, the model I have been intimating here will surely present problems for policy makers over-anxious about assessment in systematic terms. To end this paper, it may be worth considering whether the language of ‘hospitality’ poses, in some sense, more of a problem for re-orientating cosmo-global education, as I have attempted here. As I registered earlier in this paper, ‘hospitality’ has itself become something of a marketing ploy nowadays: it has been made an industry. For this reason, there is perhaps reason to think that the term is itself now too moribund to be rescued. What I have sought to demonstrate in this paper is that Derrida’s thinking on hospitality itself opens onto the dynamics of receptivity. As I have also sought to show, this allows us to understand what is at stake in Derrida’s radical re-conception of the political and its role in our lives, without falling into the traps of sensationalism. It is towards receptive ways of thinking that cosmo-global education needs to go, I would argue, if it is to avoid reinstalling the very barriers to interpersonal and intercultural ethics it claims to remove.⁹

Notes

- 1 Biesta himself discusses the ‘impossible task of writing about Derrida and doing justice to his writings.’ He states that to completely present Derrida’s thinking would not be to do justice to his work; thus to get him ‘right’ is not to get him ‘right.’ In some ways, this connects with my own call to take care when we approach Derrida’s thinking – but once again I wonder if the sensational language Biesta uses obscures the nuances of this point and the care that Derrida’s thinking calls for.
- 2 The value of literature, and particularly the novels of J. M. Coetzee, for providing a rich understanding of our moral and political lives is widely discussed – see for example Attridge (2017); John (2017); Standish (2009).
- 3 See Williams (2018) for discussion of similar themes in relation to Coetzee’s novel *Disgrace*.
- 4 Derrida’s reflections on ‘that fine theme of hospitality’ extend over a number of seminars and texts and it will not be possible to do justice to his complex discussions here. In what follows I highlight some particularly suggestive aspects of Derrida’s thinking found in these texts.
- 5 In this sense Derrida is part of a wider tradition of philosophers who take language to have a constitutive rather than merely ‘representational’ role. Charles Taylor provides a helpful discussion of these differing philosophical traditions in his books – see for example *The Language Animal*. I provide further discussion of Derrida in relation to this tradition in *The Ways We Think*.
- 6 For more development of these ideas about literature and thinking see Gearon, L and Williams, E (2018) ‘Philosophy, Literature and Education’. Special Issue of *Journal of Philosophy of Education*.
- 7 Attridge also discusses these notions particularly in relation to Coetzee’s fiction – see his *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*.
- 8 Of course this is not to suggest that Nishida and Derrida’s philosophies are entirely in line with each other Derrida’s thinking, as I have sought to show in this paper, is more focused on language and in ways that might also contrast in places with Nishida’s conception of ‘pure experience.’
- 9 Many thanks to two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on this paper.

References

- Attridge, D. (2004). *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*. London: University of Chicago Press.
- Attridge, D. (2016). *The Work of Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Attridge, D. (2017). “‘A Yes Without a No’: Philosophical Reason and the Ethics of Conversion in Coetzee’s Fiction” in Hayes, P and Wilm, J. (eds). *Beyond the Ancient Quarrel: Literature, Philosophy and J. M. Coetzee*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Barrow, R. (1987). ‘Skills Talk’ in *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 21 (2):187–195.
- Biesta, G, (1998). ‘Deconstruction, Justice and the Question of Education’ in *Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft* 1 (1998): 395-411.
- Biesta, G (2008). ‘Deconstruction, Justice and the Vocation of Education’ in Peters, M. A and Biesta, G. *Derrida, Deconstruction, and the Politics of Pedagogy*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Caputo, J. (1996). *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*. Fordham: Fordham University Press.
- Coetzee, J. M. (2004). *Waiting for the Barbarians*. London: Vintage.
- Clark, T. (1997). *Theories of Inspiration*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1991). *Adieu: To Emmanuel Levinas*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Derrida, J. (2000). *Of Hospitality*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Derrida, J. (2005). ‘Language is Never Owned: An Interview’ in Derrida, J. *Sovereignties in Question*. Fordham: Fordham University Press.
- Gearon, L and Williams, E. (2018). ‘Philosophy, Literature and Education’ in Special Issue of *Journal of Philosophy of Education*. 53(4). pp. 579-591
- John, E. (2017). ‘Coetzee and Eros: A Critique of Moral Philosophy’ in Hayes, P and Wilm, J. (eds). *Beyond the Ancient Quarrel: Literature, Philosophy and J. M. Coetzee*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Hyland, T. (1997). 'Reconsidering Competence' in *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 31 (3): 491-503.
- Marais, M. (2009). *Secretary of the Invisible: The Idea of Hospitality in the Fiction of J. M. Coetzee*. The Netherlands: Rodopi.
- OECD and PISA (2018). *Preparing our Youth for an Inclusive and Sustainable World*. OECD.
- Peters, M. A and Biesta, G. (2008). 'Introduction: The Promise of Politics and Pedagogy' in Peters, M. A and Biesta, G. *Derrida, Deconstruction, and the Politics of Pedagogy*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Standish, P. (1992). *Beyond the Self*. Ashgate: Ashgate Publishing.
- Standish, P. (2009). 'Food for Thought: Resourcing Moral Education' in *Ethics and Education*. 4:1 pp. 31-42.
- Suzuki, S. (2012). 'The Kyoto School and J.F. Herbart' in Standish, P and Saito, N (eds). *Education and the Kyoto School of Philosophy*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Taylor, C. (2016). *The Language Animal*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Williams, E. (2016). *The Ways We Think: From the Straits of Reason to the Possibilities of Thought*. London: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Williams, E. (2018). 'Language's Grace: Redemption and Education in J. M. Coetzee's Disgrace' in *Journal of Philosophy of Education* Special Issue on *Philosophy, Literature and Education*. Gearon, L and Williams, E. (eds). 53(4). pp. 627-641