

What is educational about a climate emergency?

Research in Education

2025, Vol. 0(0) 1–14

© The Author(s) 2025



Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/00345237251384873

journals.sagepub.com/home/rie



F. Tony Carusi¹ 

Abstract

Education research has been increasingly concerned about the role of instrumentalism in defining education. Within the context of the climate emergency, conceiving of education instrumentally positions educated subjects as actors capable of minimising the effects of climate change. This article is not critical of actions that mitigate the climate emergency. However, within the research that resists the instrumentalization of education, the climate emergency requires a status different from its role as an end that orients the content and practices of education. By asking what is educational about the climate emergency, this article focuses on the emergence rather than the urgency of climate change as a way for education to carry on as the climate emergency continues to present unforeseen challenges of living together. The article concludes with the irreducibility of conflict to an emergent understanding of the educational, a feature that commits education to an incomplete and porous world.

Keywords

philosophy, subjectification, rhetoric, instrumentalism

This paper considers the question of what is educational about a climate emergency. The term climate emergency refers to the increasingly lethal climatological conditions for many if not most lifeforms on Earth due to weather instability and temperature extremes. This questioning of the educational status of the climate emergency occurs in view of recent research attuned to the role instrumentalism plays in defining education as a means

¹Institute of Education, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Massey University, Palmerston North, Aotearoa New Zealand

Corresponding author:

F. Tony Carusi, Institute of Education, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Massey University, Private Bag 11-222, Palmerston North 4442, Aotearoa New Zealand.

Email: f.a.carusi@massey.ac.nz

toward various ends including the educationalization of social problems (Fendler, 2018; Smeyers and Depaepe, 2008), the politics of instrumentalism (Atif, 2024; Carusi, 2022b), education as an end-in-itself (Carusi and Szkudlarek, 2024; Vlieghe and Zamojski, 2019), as well as research theorising education as explicitly non-instrumental (Lewis, 2020; Osberg and Biesta, 2020). If a theory of education takes on board an instrumental arrangement whereby a predefined, if changing, end constitutes education as a means toward achieving that end, then the question of the climate emergency posed by this paper is answered almost before it begins: Yes, the climate emergency is a problem that should be addressed by educational means. However, if education is theorised so its instrumental role remains undecidable or is specifically rejected, as the research cited above does, then there are two responses to the question: (1) no, there is nothing educational about the climate emergency or (2) yes, there is something educational about the climate emergency, but education will need to be figured differently than as a means toward the melioration of the emergency. This latter response is pursued here. To frame the question in terms of the above: How can the climate emergency be educational without reintroducing instrumentalism into education?

A response to this question comprises the following essay and proceeds according to a series of interlinked points. First, the article considers some of the difficulties of defining the educational while maintaining the indeterminacy of the subject. This indeterminacy is key to positioning the subject without also prescribing a course of action for one to follow. However, the climate emergency can present difficulties to educational research that supports the subject as indeterminate by stopping short of prescribing urgent actions to the subject. The focus for this article, then, is not on the climate emergency as a call to action to be answered by education. Instead, this article takes up the question of the times and worlds of education as emergent in our climate emergency. By focusing on different arrangements of time and world, emergency can be construed in terms of its emergence rather than its urgency, which holds educational consequences for the climate emergency. With these consequences in mind, the paper concludes by underlining conflict and dissensus for the educational sense of the climate emergency argued for here.

The indeterminacy of the educational subject

The term 'educational' is difficult to leave alone. Grammatically, its ending suggests an adjectival status accustoming readers to expect some object to follow and be modified thus focusing on the educational aspects of that object. The educational, as a term, leaves room for something more; it even implants the expectation that something further will follow in the form of an object. Educational research, educational theory, educational practice: each of these follows such a formula. This is to say nothing of the use of educational to say something is good for a person: it's educational! Or the ambiguity of a term like educational policy which can mean policy that legislates education as well as policy that educates.

When considering what is educational about an object or term like the climate emergency, one risks making its adjectival work into an object, namely education. This allows phrases like climate emergency education and environmental education to designate an object (education) determined by its modifier (climate emergency). To the degree

that environmental education, for instance, is understood as “education for the environment” (Fien, 2000), the scope and terrain of education is oriented within the context and confines of the environment. On this basis, to speak of environmental and climate emergency education is likely to evoke a sense of historical and future-oriented actions informed by empirical evidence and conceptual frameworks of climate change to abate the ongoing emergency. Yet this is the sense of the subject-supposed-to-act that this paper seeks an alternative to when considering what is educational about the climate emergency. To be clear, the focus of this article is not to refute the shaping and directing of education to address the climate emergency, but to consider the advent of the educational within a climate emergency without assuming or necessitating an instrumental relation between the two. The concern for this article, then, is to ask how the climate emergency conditions the educational not as a means toward an end for determining a subject’s actions but as a context that remains open for the educational to appear.

A focus on the educational as a determining means is perhaps one of the most common, if contested, features of educational theory, policy and practice. When viewing the educational as determining, two points in time must be arranged in order to identify changes for which education will be responsible (or accountable). From the pervasive phrase “the teacher is the most significant in-school factor in raising student achievement” (see Carusi, 2022b) to the more heterogenous prescriptions of social mobility, globally competitive workforces, social justice and liberation, education is the means by which societies, markets, communities and individuals achieve (and fail to achieve) its variously assigned goals. Thus, understanding the educational as determining by its effects is a banal, if retroactive (Mendel, 2022), assumption. To question how the climate emergency determines the educational is more uncommon and requires some sense of what goes into the determination of the educational.

Subjectification offers a starting point for expressing what is educational about the climate emergency. Biesta writes that subjectification has a unique, if often neglected, role in education and that ‘education becomes uneducational if it only focuses on socialization –i.e., on the insertion of “new-comers” into existing sociocultural and political orders’ (2010: 75). The being and becoming of subjects emphasised by subjectification positions the educational as conditioned by ‘our freedom as human beings and, more specifically, our freedom to act or to refrain from action’ (Biesta, 2020: 93). Subjectification is not an effect of education but constitutive of the educational. Furthermore, a focus on the subject entails an indeterminacy regarding the subject’s actions. Subjects are educationally free in two senses: free to act or not and free from determination by existing socio-political orders, this latter being the distinguishing factor between subjectification and socialization.

When the climate emergency is construed as a demand for and to the subject to act, the indeterminacy of the educational subject is replaced by one supposed to mitigate and meliorate the cumulative effect of humanity that makes climate increasingly inhospitable to human and non-human life. Indeed, the need for immediate responses to global ecological disasters along with the mass relocations of people from their homes for climatological reasons and the subsequent increase in xenophobic responses from more and more nations, all call for subjects who will act, not for educators defending subjects’ indeterminacy. Yet, by attending to the indeterminacy of the subject, the educational

serves as a site for the new and unanticipated events that the climate emergency continues to produce.

Additional to Biesta's notion of subjectification, [Carusi and Szkudlarek \(2020\)](#) conceptualise the educational to further emphasise the indeterminacy of the subject as well as the contingency of education. Elaborating [Laclau's \(1991\)](#) claim that the impossibility of society gives rise to the social, [Carusi and Szkudlarek \(2020\)](#) consider how the impossibility of education generates the educational. This approach takes education as a signifier that has no signified, that is, a signifier not only emptied of the thing signified, but also capable of incorporating heterogeneous demands for what is to be signified ([Laclau, 1996, 2005](#)). In terms of the educational, discourses of education that direct action to the formation of multiple subjects (and objects), from global to individual, constitute the educational. Whilst aiming for education, what is produced instead is the educational. For example, demands for education to produce a winning nation in a competitive global marketplace and demands for education to produce democratic citizens who collaborate across differences are both able to orient education in accordance with their contradictory demands. Yet, education continually fails to produce the unregulated free market of neoliberalism or the citizenry that celebrates diversity that these demands envision. Instead, they form the educational, that is, particular attempts whose composition relies upon a universal notion of education designed to impossibly include all people, where "all" is simultaneously an exclusive and inclusive term.

For the scope of the argument presented here, the educational, as a name for the particular attempts to constitute education, entails the indeterminacy of the subject to the degree that each attempt, like the neoliberal and democratic examples above, suppose a particular subject. The subject of education, like education, becomes a vanishing point that draws educational discourses toward the realization of education and its subjects ([Carusi, 2025](#)). The many subjects imagined and symbolised to populate free markets or democratic nations are constrained by the respective aims of education, yet as educational, subjects (and education) remain indeterminate as no educational discourse exhausts the subjects and educations that emerge. It is within this theoretical framing of the educational where the subject continues to be articulated differently because of its indeterminacy that I ask whether the climate emergency is educational.

Is the climate emergency educational?

In what sense is the climate emergency something educational, that is, something that attends to the indeterminacy of the subject? I pose this question in view of research that critiques instrumentalizations of education that seek educational means of resolving a host of socio-economic and ecological problems, including the climate emergency. Critiques of instrumentalism have appeared in environmental education (e.g., [Bonnett, 2023](#); [Stables, 2013](#); [Stickney and Bonnett, 2020](#)), but recent research in philosophy of education expands how instrumentalism determines education and offers new lines of inquiry for reconsidering the role of education in the times and worlds of a climate emergency. In an introduction to a special issue on the politics of educational instrumentalism, Carusi notes that "while instrumentalism may appear to be a natural part of education and therefore the ground for a consensus beyond the need for a politics, the articles contained [in this special

issue] are concerned with the politics and dissent obscured by the normative role instrumentalism plays in educational theory and policy” (2022a: 281). The question rephrased then: Are we able to approach the relationship between the educational and the climate emergency in a way that does not foster the instrumental normativity that already reduces education to a tool that should or can solve multiple and contradictory social problems? If we are not, the climate emergency is not a matter for educational attention. But if this is a question we should turn attention to, how do we avoid entering into the instrumental problem-solving discourses such as that articulated by the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals for Quality Education that sets the target of “ensur[ing] that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development” (United Nations, 2024)? The acquisition of knowledge and skills, whether they be for promoting sustainable development or an even more globally competitive workforce renders education through what Mendel (2022) has called retroactive instrumentalism, that is by conceiving the educational as means retroactively from pre-given ends. Pronouncements of ends that the educational should be a means toward, such as the UN’s SDGs, afford a normative status to consensus contrary to the constitutive differences at work in educational practices that remain unresolved in dissensus and conflict (Todd and Säfström, 2008). If the climate emergency is going to be educational, we will not be able to engage in the cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011) of saying that education will be the tool to save us from climate change. To suggest a way to conceive the climate emergency as educational without reducing either to an instrumental formula, this paper turns to distinguish between two senses of the emergency.

Two senses of emergency in the climate emergency

The climate emergency, on first hearing, stands out for its urgency. Through conventions of the Anglophone sound, we hear the word urgency in emergency, and we have multiple contexts which bear this sense of emergency out: the emergency rooms of hospitals and television dramas, emergency aid for people and nations undergoing acute political and climatological crises, emergency plans for potential crises that do not provide the time and space to reflectively act. The climate emergency in its sense of urgency is something we are currently experiencing. This sense of emergency is defined by its immediacy; it is happening right here, right now. This is not to say we should do nothing or can do nothing to lessen the ecological devastation. We can organize, plan, build, even learn, but in the service of the urgent matter of the climate emergency, the educational relationship is not necessary nor given the time to appear. The pace at which the educational proceeds is easily outstripped by an emergency that requires immediate and unapologetic attention.

However, some philosophers of education are turning away from the urgent characteristics of the climate emergency in favour of a second sense. This turn considers what is emergent in the emergency, which offers an educational nuance to the term since the emergent is premised on something appearing, often without anticipation or plan, and not explicitly contained in what came before. In other words, different from the planned action that urgency demands, an emphasis on emergence turns us toward the new and unexpected; what is yet to be determined rather than what has been. Ruitenberg (2020) intimates this kind of emergence in an aporetic rather than transformative environmental

education in part because of the teleological promise that transformation makes but will not deliver. She writes “[t]ransformation is never transformational enough, being either too incremental or too small-scale (or both) to justify the optimism.” Instead, she suggests “the question is not how we decide in which direction to swim to reach shore, or how we train to swim faster, but how we learn to float together” (p. 837). She points to the grouping that emerges from the flood as the educationally important moment. Rather than getting caught up in promised shores or preparing for possible floods, the educational takes place in living together. Yet, as Davis (2017) writes, living together is “dead in the water” (p. 444), if the “we” forecloses itself from the irreducible “toward” that keeps togetherness open. In other words, the “we” is never a closed or coherent whole but remains incomplete and partial. As inviting as the new can sound, particularly when heralded as transformational and problem-solving, a key feature of the emergent is its uncertain and changing make-up. What is educational in an emergency is to carry on with the indeterminacy of the emergent. The educational won’t give answers on how to live together but something, not necessarily answers, will emerge in the doing.

The times of emergency

Floating together implies a time of the emergent that runs differently to the time of urgency. Urgency wears a 3-faced watch that shows an already-missed past, the anxious now, and a shortening future. “It would have been better if we’d started yesterday” is the sign on the wall of the Climate Emergency manager’s office. This sense of being too late alongside the daily deluge of information about the climate catastrophe works in a time not out of joint but out of time, and as mentioned above, education needs time. It is hard not to recall *skholé* (σχολή) which offers a connection to leisure time and hints at the lack of haste important to an emergent time of education.¹ Inverting modern divisions between school and ‘the real world,’ the opposite of leisure time for the ancient Greeks was work time, which they called *askolia* (ασχολία), that is *without* leisure time. *Skholé* in this arrangement becomes the primary term and work time relies on its designation secondarily as that time defined according to the absence of leisure. In thinking of a slower pacing, Todd (2020) proposes the time of *kairos* (καιρός) that offers a sense of time that is without haste. She writes that *kairos* “introduces neither finality nor certitude, but openness to the vicissitudes of life itself. As such, it is a time of living and staying with our experiences – even in the face of a vanishing future” (Todd, 2020: 1120). Todd goes on to characterise kairoic time as a “living present,” suggesting that emergence may not wear a watch at all. Todd suggests kairoic time can enable education and its members to “develop a living relationship to the more-than-human world in the present” (2020: 1112), a relationship that may combat the paralytic sorrow that often comes with daily headlines of environmental catastrophe. And extending from Todd’s sense of the living present, we can expand *kairos* to those senses of the educational that include practice, repetition, and experience. In its ancient uses, *kairos* denotes the moment when the archer releases their arrow or the weaver sends their shuttle through the warp of the loom. Much can be made from these metaphors, but important for the distinction between urgency and emergence, the time of *kairos* is what emerges from and through practice, not through the demand to enter it. This

is a time that one stays in rather than actively extinguishes as too late: a time in which we can float together.

Rather than offer education as an instrumental solution to the climate emergency, these authors characterise education as a relation that occurs within a time and space of emergence, and in this sense, the climate emergency can be an educational matter. To respond directly to the opening question, the climate emergency can be educational when the emphasis falls on the emergence of emergency. These approaches through emergence speak to a relational notion of education that is neither given in advance nor premised on a mastery or control of the subject as they are positioned by the climate or even one another. However, up to this point the argument has only glancingly mentioned the role of conflict and dissensus. A part of what makes these slow educational gatherings appear as pleasantly floating and remaining in the present is how we imagine the world in which this togetherness takes place. This is not to suggest Ruitenberg and Todd are implying such pleasantness, but differently, to acknowledge the rose-tinge frequently applied to the world in which the educational is set. Smiling children, saviour teachers, and the world in which education is the solution to society's problems all contribute to ready-made visions of the subject as happy, dutiful, and instrumental, which is to say as a subject already determined in their attitudes and actions.

We may be inclined to see our contingent and momentary flotillas as a peaceful oasis, or at least as a coherent group who not only float together but also generally get along. The work these imaginaries do belie a world that offers hope, even a "relentless positivity" (Clarke, 2019: 184), precisely on the grounds of a preexisting consensus. Students will all be smiling, teachers will all be saviours, *No Child Left Behind* (2002), *Every Student Succeeds* (2015), *Educational Excellence Everywhere* (2016), and so on. Such consensus serves as an *arche* and a *telos*, that is, our beginning or source and what must be returned to if we've departed from it. We can and will get along because there is some ground of basic agreement not only between us who are present now, but between us all. In light of the all and everywhere these notions of consensus elicit and the global scale of the climate emergency, we can now consider the world generated by a consensus-based urgency and an alternative world of emergence irreducibly riddled by dissensus.

The world of conflict & education

A world premised on consensus is part of what motivates the critical project of this article, but this is not to suggest such a critical position is without a world. However, the world plays some funny games in its rhetoricity (Davis, 2017). The world is what everyone arrives with and forms part of what Lacan (1974) has called one's edupation. The dupes we are as subjects in resistance to our indeterminacy partly relies on the world we symbolise and imagine in order to position the subjects we are and wish to be. The world acts for many as a kind of synecdoche that allows parts to stand for wholes by arranging an order that makes sense of us as subjects. For instance, while internet use is not universally available, we have since the early 1990s referred to the world wide web. Those internet-connected parts form the world-wideness of the web. We also have the World Bank, the World Wildlife Fund, the World Health Organization, World Wrestling Entertainment, the Women's World Cup, the US baseball World Series. This doesn't begin to broach those

worlds we find in education discourses of world-class and world-leading standards and curricula. The OECD annually publishes their “Education at a glance” report that bills itself as “the definitive guide to the state of education around the world” (2023: 21). These uses of the world point to the way the world can offer a sense of wholeness and provides a kind of closure that assures we’ve included all the parts that make up the world. In fact, it is more precise to say these iterations of the world are all efforts in worlding. In what Carusi (2021) has discussed as ontological rhetorics, worlding is an act that produces the object of which it speaks through tropological arrangements like metaphor and synecdoche. In the cases above, the world is produced in each iteration as a way to project a whole into which its relevant parts are ordered: a place for everything and everything in its place. For example, the OECD’s claim to provide the definitive guide to education around the world articulates the whole of the world into which education fits and can be compared between nation state members of the OECD. This is not the world of oceans and land, but of nation states. It is in this synecdochal sense that I will discuss the world today, especially because not all synecdoches are the same. As a quick caveat, there are other ways of conceiving the world that do not fit into a synecdochic register. For instance, Donna Haraway’s work on worlding as “speculative fabulation” (2013, 2016) offers some sense of the metaphors that worlding evokes, especially in light of Vico’s (1984) claim that every metaphor is a fable in brief. However, for the purposes of this article, the synecdochic register of worlding offers contrasting modes that further explicate the senses of emergency that determine education according to urgency and emergence.

First a note on synecdoche. While this is not a well-known trope, it has everyday uses as indicated above. In academic research, synecdoche has strong connections to social change. Foss and Domenici (2001) discuss the use of synecdoche in the Argentinean protests of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*. Dalke and McCormack (2007) make use of synecdoche along with feminist critical theory to build transdisciplinary knowledge when teaching their “Gender and Science” course. Laclau (2005) writes that the hegemonic relation theorised in his work with Mouffe (2001) “gives clear centrality to... synecdoche. It also suggests that synecdoche is not simply one more rhetorical device... but has a different ontological function” (p. 72). Across these iterations, the authors render synecdoche as a trope that works in a political register. While there is not space to explore this shared attribute, the use made of synecdoche here continues this trajectory to suggest that the worlds of urgency and emergence entail a different sense of politics from one another, viz. a consensual politics of urgency and a dissensual politics of emergence.

In the context of the two senses of emergency, urgency and emergence, we might say they are working from different worlds, which we can discuss in terms of two different kinds of synecdoche: closed and failed. In a closed synecdoche, the whole successfully closes so its parts can be ordered and ascribed a proper function within that whole. This closure allows for notions of order and even health to be quantified and evaluated, thereby enabling our references to the life and death of schools (Ravitch, 2011), education, and so on. White (2000) notes this feature of synecdoche and characterises the trope as the basis of organicism. In its most closed expression, we can articulate the part/whole relationship at dizzying levels of order. For instance, Plato (1996) writes of the city as the soul writ large in the *Republic* (368d-369a) and of the cosmos as the city writ large in the *Timaeus* (24c, 42e, 69b). In this Platonic sense, the ordering principle that governs the tripartite soul

also governs *kallipolis*, the beautiful city, and the cosmos, thus the whole and part stand for each other in such an order that the wholes of the cosmos, the city, and the soul each are identical as parts of the governing principles of justice. Thus, the subject is already determined in the world of a closed synecdoche and has no time or need for the challenges that indeterminacy holds for it.

Within the context of the urgent sense of the climate emergency, and the immediacy demanded to act, a closed synecdoche is extremely useful. The world is in need of urgent and immediate action, and our actions are a matter of life or death. The place of the subject in such urgency is the-subject-supposed-to-act. Moreover, given the human role in the construction of the Anthropocene, our culpability further urges our need to act as our acts are largely what brought us to this precipice. This works, as Laclau (2005) suggests, by fixing the ontological horizon toward which all action must be oriented. To be clear, the fixing of horizons is unavoidable, what Laclau (2005) calls ‘politically necessary’, but it is only ever done partially. Social change occurs specifically through such a process of fixing an ontological horizon that allows parts to act toward the whole of the climate activists’ demand for change. However, because the decision to fix the horizon constitutes the urgency to act in the climate emergency, what becomes closed out are those emergent qualities that are not directly a part of remedying the climate emergency, yet key in attending to the indeterminacy of the subject that makes up the educational relation. In a closed synecdoche we lose the ability to stay with the subject who is unresolved and does not fit or is resolved in their refusal to fit. This closure forms the basis for consensus at the expense of dissenting voices. This is not to suggest that the calls for urgent action must attend to all dissenting voices. The point for this paper is to argue for a sense of the climate emergency that is educational, and in this sense, dissenting voices are key to the emergence of new positions that floating together encounters.

A dissenting world

The role of dissensus in education has received attention in education research (Clarke and Phelan, 2015; Heimans and Singh, 2018), particularly in the figure of the educator (Ball, 2016; Biesta, 2019, 2020; Carusi, 2017, 2024; Heimans et al., 2024). Across this research, dissensus is theorised as a constitutive part of education that is often effaced through attachments to and assumptions of consensus as a ground from which educational projects should be built. However, less attention has been paid in dissensus-oriented research to configuring the world in which educational dissensus is a feature instead of a flaw. A failed synecdoche, however, suggests precisely such a world.

Synecdoche gains its ‘failed’ sense in connection with Laclau’s notion of ‘failed transcendence.’ He writes, “[t]he social terrain is structured, in my view, not as completely immanent or as the result of some transcendent structure, but through what we could call *failed transcendence*” (Laclau, 2005: 244, emphasis in original). Laclau blurs the categories of immanence and transcendence in the social terrain, pursuing instead an indeterminacy that can neither arrive at its universal and transcendental form of Society nor be composed strictly of particularities in immanent but asocial terms. This indeterminate sense of transcendence differs from current notions of transcendence in environmental education that theorise transcendence apart from its blurring into immanence (Stickney

and Bonnett, 2020, Bonnett, 2023. See Bonnett (2012, 2015) for single mentions of immanence that may be sympathetic to the notion of failed transcendence used here but remain undeveloped as to the constitutive role played by each towards the other). For Laclau, it is precisely the failure of transcendence to maintain a categorical difference to immanence that keeps the social open to ongoing change, introduces an openness to the world premised on conflict, and offers an understanding of climate change that remains educational.

The failure of transcendence is “the different ontological function” Laclau alludes to above that makes synecdoche central to the role of dissensus as something that cannot be erased if the climate emergency is to be educational. The positing of ontological horizons to constitute a whole is shared between closed and failed synecdoche, but their difference lies in the status of that horizon. A closed synecdoche affords the status of a transcendental structure to the whole, that is a world that is “objectively the case” reducing disagreement and conflict to a matter of who is right and who is wrong, which then determines how the subject is supposed to act. The world in its transcendence offers a ground common to everyone from which consensus can be built or according to which those who deny the ground are objectively wrong. A failed synecdoche, however, renders the horizon as always temporary and insufficient to such certainty.

Within a failed synecdoche, the emphasis falls on the conflicting roles of ontological horizons rather than proceeding from their certainty. Dissensus is central to a failed synecdoche because it prevents the whole from closing and thus enables an opening for the emergent to appear—its failure is its strength in this sense. The world remains porous and incomplete such that we may speak of the hole world as opposed to the whole world. When there is no conflict, the worlds circumscribed by incompatible horizons remain insular and unchallenged, each a whole unto itself. Conflict in the sense developed here is what opens new holes in the world. We may consider these holes from any number of disciplinary angles, but as educational, this conflict is what keeps the indeterminacy of the subject undecided, which allows us to remain within a kairotic and floating time. Within this failed whole, the question of worlds, what world, where is it, who is in it, and so on, is a part of the work introduced by a failed synecdoche and undertaken as defences of the subject’s indeterminacy on the part of the educator. The heterogeneity that such questions elicit, the multiple and incommensurate worlds, is not directed toward a new consensus, but remains unresolved and full of holes. The climate change denier, the flat earther, the saved and soon-to-be-raptured, for instance, are going to have worlds that some will not be a part of, and the immanent world will likely not be inviting to them. However, the emergences of the climate emergency and the indeterminacy of the subjects in the educational relationship begin with these conflicts rather than end.

ORCID iD

F. Tony Carusi  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9568-0736>

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Note

1. Admittedly, this connection between school and *skholé* is largely broken by the modern school where time is made alarmingly audible by the bell schedule and measured in terms of time-on-task. Contemporary school curricula, policy and practice that direct students' time toward work-readiness and work force preparation are better described by *askolia*. However, the modern school does not erase entirely the connection between school and *skholé* due to its etymological history (Anastasiadis, 2004). Within the argument made here *skholé* is more closely connected to education than current schooling.

References

- Anastasiadis VI (2004) Idealized ΣΧΟΛΗ and disdain for work: aspects of philosophy and politics in ancient democracy. *The Classical Quarterly* 54(1): 58–79. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3556283>
- Atif A (2024) More than we think and less than we wish on the instrumentality of education. In: Fitzpatrick N and Vaughan C (eds) *Technē Logos, Care and the (Neg) Anthropocene: The Second Annual Conference of the European Culture and Technology Laboratory*. Technological University. <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/eutpresscon/5/>
- Ball SJ (2016) Subjectivity as a site of struggle: refusing neoliberalism? *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 37(8): 1129–1146. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2015.1044072>
- Berlant L (2011) *Cruel Optimism*. Duke University Press.
- Biesta G (2019) *Obstinate education: Reconnecting school and society*. Brill Sense.
- Biesta G (2020) Risking ourselves in education: qualification, socialization, and subjectification revisited. *Educational Theory* 70(1): 89–104. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12411>
- Bonnett M (2012) Environmental concern, moral education and our place in nature. *Journal of Moral Education* 41(3): 285–300. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2012.691643>
- Bonnett M (2015) The powers that be: environmental education and the transcendent. *Policy Futures in Education* 13(1): 42–56. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210314566730>
- Bonnett M (2023) Environmental consciousness, nature, and the philosophy of education: some key themes. *Environmental Education Research* 29(6): 829–839. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2021.1951174>
- Carusi FT (2017) Why Bother Teaching? Despairing the Ethical Through Teaching that Does Not Follow. *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 36(6): 633–645. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-017-9569-0>
- Carusi FT (2021) The ontological rhetorics of education policy: A non-instrumental theory. *Journal of Education Policy* 36(2): 232–252. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2019.1665713>
- Carusi F. T. (2022a) Symposium Introduction: The Politics of Educational Instrumentalism. *Educational Theory* 72(3): 281–286. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12530>

- Carusi FT (2022b) Refusing Teachers and the Politics of Instrumentalism in Educational Policy. *Educational Theory* 72(3): 383–397. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12537>
- Carusi FT (2024) Failure Is not an Option: A Topology of Education’s Impossibility. Teacher education and its discontents: Politics, knowledge, and ethics. Routledge, 15–25. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003422358-2>
- Carusi FT (2025) Between the teacher and educator: A political analysis of an impossible combination. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education* 53(3): 259–276. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2025.2504369>
- Carusi FT and Szkudlarek T (2020) Education is society ... and there is no society: The ontological turn of education. *Policy Futures in Education* 18(7): 907–921. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210320933018>
- Carusi FT and Szkudlarek T (2024) Ontological Instrumentalism, the Autotelic, and the Impossible Identity of Education. In: Wittig S., Mayer R. and Sperschneider J. (eds). Ernesto Laclau. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 67–85. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-43182-2_3
- Clarke M (2019) Education beyond reason and redemption: a detour through the death drive. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* 27(2): 183–197. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2018.1447508>
- Clarke M and Phelan A (2015) The power of negative thinking in and for teacher education. *Power and Education* 7(3): 257–271. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1757743815607025>
- Dalke A and McCormack E (2007) Synecdoche and surprise: transdisciplinary knowledge production. *Journal of Research Practice* 3(2). Available at: <https://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/106/99.html>.
- Davis D (2017) Rhetoricity at the end of the world. *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 50(4): 431–451. Available at: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/678354>.
- Education GBD (2016) *Educational Excellence Everywhere*. HM Government.
- Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, *Public Law* 114-95, United States Congress 114, S. 1177 (2015).
- Fendler L (2018) Educationalization. In: Smeyers P (ed). *International Handbook of Philosophy of Education*. Springer International Publishing, 1169–1183. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-72761-5_81
- Fien J (2000) ‘Education for the Environment: A critique’—an analysis. *Environmental Education Research* 6(2): 179–192. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/713664671>
- Foss KA and Domenici KL (2001) Haunting Argentina: Synecdoche in the protests of the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 87(3): 237–258. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630109384335>
- Haraway D (2013) SF: science fiction, speculative fabulation, string figures, so far. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology* 3: 1–18.
- Haraway D (2016) Companion species, mis-recognition, and queer worlding. In: Giffney N and Hird M (eds) *Queering the Non/human*. Routledge, pp. xxiii–xxxvi.
- Heimans S and Singh P (2018) Putting the steam back into critique? ‘Gathering’ for critical–dissensual collaborations in education policy research. *Policy Futures in Education* 16(2): 185–201. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210317736209>

- Heimans S, Hansen DR and Clarke M (2024) Towards a new standard of dissensus. In: Magnússon G, Phelan AM, Heimans S, et al. (eds) *Teacher Education and its Discontents*. 1st edition. Routledge, 176–197. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003422358-11>
- Lacan J (1974) *Les Non-dupes Errent: Seminar 21* (C. Gallagher, Trans.), Unpublished Manuscript. <https://www.lacanireland.com/web/translations/seminars/>
- Laclau E (1991) The impossibility of society. *C Theory* 15(1–3): 24–27. Available at: <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/ctheory/article/view/14267/5043>.
- Laclau E (1996) Why do empty signifiers matter to politics? In: *Emancipation(s)*. Verso, pp. 36–46.
- Laclau E (2005) *On Populist Reason*. Verso.
- Laclau E and Mouffe C (2001) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. 2nd edition. Verso, p. 12408771.
- Lewis T (2020) Education for potentiality (against instrumentality). *Policy Futures in Education* 18(7): 878–891. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210320922742>
- Mendel M (2022) On retroactive instrumentality. *Educational Theory* 72(3): 369–382. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12536>
- OECD (2023) *Education at a Glance 2023*. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/content/publication/e13bef63-en>
- Osberg D and Biesta G (2020) Beyond curriculum: groundwork for a non-instrumental theory of education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 53: 57–70. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1750362>
- Plato (1996) Republic (P Shorey, Trans.). In Hamilton E and Cairns H (eds) *The Collected Dialogues of Plato: Including the Letters*. Princeton University Press, pp. 575–844.
- Ravitch D (2011) *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education*. Basic Books.
- Ruitenberc C (2020) The cruel optimism of transformative environmental education. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 54(4): 832–837. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12468>
- Smeyers P and Depaepe M (2008) *Educational Research: The Educationalization of Social Problems*. Springer. <https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9781402097225>
- Stables A (2013) The unsustainability imperative? Problems with ‘sustainability’ and ‘sustainable development’ as regulative ideals. *Environmental Education Research* 19(2): 177–186. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2012.729813>
- Stickney J and Bonnett M (2020) ‘Emplaced transcendence’ as ecologising education in Michael Bonnett’s environmental philosophy. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 54(4): 1087–1096. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12476>
- Todd S (2020) Creating aesthetic encounters of the world, or teaching in the presence of climate sorrow. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 54(4): 1110–1125. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12478>
- Todd S and Säfström CA (2008) Democracy, education and conflict: rethinking respect and the place of the ethical. *Journal of Educational Controversy* 3(1): 1–11. Available at: <https://cedar.wvu.edu/jec/vol3/iss1/12>.
- The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, *Public Law* 107-110, United States Congress 107, 20 USC (2002).
- United Nations. (2024). *Goal 4 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs*. Retrieved August 21, 2024, from <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>

- Vico G (1984) *The New Science of Giambattista Vico* (T. Bergin & M. Fisch, Trans.; Unabridged translation of the 3rd ed. (1744) with the addition of “Practic of the new science”). Cornell University Press.
- Vlieghe J and Zamojski P (2019) *Towards an Ontology of Teaching: Thing-Centred Pedagogy, Affirmation and Love for the World*. Springer. <https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=5811849>
- White HV (2000) *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Johns Hopkins University Press.