

Dissensus, education and democracy

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In this paper, we explore the relations between education and democracy. We draw on Rancière's thinking about dissensus to do this. From a Rancièrian perspective, dissensus concerns the irruption into sense of an incommensurate element. This irruption reveals what he calls the 'wrong' in any given distribution of sense- the way that there are always some people, whose only part in the production of 'sense', is none. We highlight, in this paper, work that has been undertaken that can demonstrate the operations of dissensus when the 'part of the no part' take one, and 'sense' is changed as a result. We will use this to open up questions about education- democracy relations, as for Rancière, dissensus is integral to democracy. As such, there is no focus, in our paper, on the 'system features' of democracy; voting, political representation, party electoral systems, and so on (and this is a point of debate about, and critique of, Rancière's work- how the 'system' interacts with dissensus- this is beyond our scope here to explore this in any detail). Instead, we use Rancière's work on democracy (Rancière, 2006) that attends to democratic acts- and these acts show how any democratic 'process' is impossible to predetermine and always slightly beyond control. Therefore, such acts (which are themselves examples of dissensus) are contra to contemporary efforts in education to predetermine what education is and how it is to be done in ways that are increasingly standardised (via teacher standards, national assessment and curriculum regimes). Also, the democratic process, as we outline it here, is antithetical to producing education as a standardised entity for use in a market. To this end, our work attempts to show, on one hand, how education might become adversarial to contemporary attempts at standardisation- to show how it is non-marketable because its form emerges only during/after the fact. There is literally nothing to sell, not even the process, which is always 'new' in any case. On the other hand, we suggest that democracy, if we draw on Rancièrian scholarship, does not 'exist' as such, but has to be continually renewed and brought to life between people – so it is precarious and fleeting (see Rancière, 2010); and that, connectedly, one might become better at democracy by trying to 'do it' more often and that education is one place where this 'trying' might occur.