
Surprise in Schools: Martin Buber and dialogic schooling

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ABSTRACT The philosopher Martin Buber described the central role of surprise in education. Surprise is not an alternative to planning and order in schools, and it is not even an alternative to repetitive practice. It is, instead, that which must be allowed to occur in any dialogic encounter. Schooling that is creative and filled with hope will also be surprising; schooling that is wholly predetermined, certain, and perfect (at least in its own eyes), will be unsurprising – and also uneducational. Darwinian theories of evolution by natural selection are similar to communitarian anarchist challenges to political wishes for precise, centralised, planning. And the necessity of genetic mutation alongside largely repetitive copying, in such theories, provides a model for the necessity of surprise even alongside repetitive, transmissive, and copied work in schools. Surprise overcomes the potential of schools to be soulless institutions. It is promoted here as a defining characteristic of truly educational, dialogic schooling.

Introduction

Many people in schools dislike surprises, and try to have everything planned and predictable. This article suggests that, whilst planning is necessary, surprises are inevitable, and it is the presence of surprise that makes a school educational. The article is based on and is an exploration of the educational philosophy of Martin Buber (1878-1965). A 'real lesson', Buber tells us, is 'neither a routine repetition nor a lesson whose findings the teacher knows before he starts, but one which develops in mutual surprises' (Buber, 2002, p. 241). He says this, not as an incidental celebration of spontaneity, but as an illustration of the central element of his philosophical anthropology. The truly human life is neither individualist nor collectivist, but is lived through dialogue in the place 'in between', where the 'I' and the 'thou' both gain their existence. 'Being, lived in dialogue', he says, 'receives even in extreme dereliction a harsh and

strengthening sense of reciprocity; being, lived in monologue, will not, even in the tenderest intimacy, grope out over the outlines of the self' (p. 24). Surprise, then, is the sign that genuine dialogue is happening, a form of dialogue that is neither 'technical' (i.e. the exchange of information 'prompted solely by the need of objective understanding'), nor 'monologue disguised as dialogue' (p. 22). Buber applies his understanding of surprise specifically to therapy – according to Friedman, for whom Buber believed '[t]he therapist must be ready to be surprised', (Buber, 1998, p. 27) – and to teaching. 'Only in his whole being, in all his spontaneity can the educator truly affect the whole being of his pupil' (Buber, 2002, p. 125, here and elsewhere using non-inclusive language).

The reference to 'mutual surprise' in lessons is worth quoting in full, as it explains why lessons, schooling, and education in general must be dialogic, and cannot be understood as either individualistic or collective enterprises.

In a real conversation (that is, not one whose individual parts have been preconcerted, but one which is completely spontaneous, in which each speaks directly to his partner and calls forth his unpredictable reply), a real lesson (that is, neither a routine repetition nor a lesson whose findings the teacher knows before he starts, but one which develops in mutual surprises), a real embrace and not one of mere habit, a real duel and not a mere game – in all these what is essential does not take place in each of the participants or in a neutral world which includes the two and all other things; but it takes place between them in the most precise sense, as it were in a dimension which is accessible only to them both. (Buber, 2002, pp. 241-242)

Real conversations, embraces and duels, like real lessons, are dialogic, unpredictable, and surprising. All are examples of what is neither individual nor collective, and education is a prime example of this. Buber's interest in education was not restricted to its role as an example of his broader philosophy. He worked as director of the Centre for Jewish Adult Education in Nazi Germany up until 1938 (a remarkable feat of educational courage), and wrote a number of significant pieces on education, notably an address for a conference on creativity in education at Heidelberg in 1925, and one on character education in Tel-Aviv in 1939 (two of the chapters in Buber, 2002). In these he writes 'of the significance of the dialogical principle in the sphere of education, the first for its groundwork, the second for its most important task' (p. x). Late in his life (in 1957, aged 79), in a postscript to his most famous book, *I and Thou*, he writes on the nature of dialogue for teachers (Buber, 1958, pp. 164-165).

This article presents aspects of Buber's philosophy as of significance in current education debates. There has been much writing on dialogue in education (Haynes, 2002; Alexander, 2006; Wegerif, 2008), and especially on dialogue and religion in education (Smart, 1960; Ipgrave, 2003; Avest et al, 2009). However, a range of meanings of 'dialogue' has been used. Exploring

the concept from the point of view of surprise makes it clear why Buber's position is both distinctive and of contemporary relevance. Surprise will be explored with respect to school students and teachers, and there is consideration of the significance of the *absence* of surprise. Policymakers, and more generally those with power, are often reluctant to acknowledge the importance of surprise, and they will be addressed, too. Throughout, the more general issue of dialogic schooling is considered, and the particularity of 'ordinary' dialogue. Ordinary dialogue is distinguished from the more grandiose and exclusive Leavisite conversation of great minds – the 'great tradition' (Leavis, 1948). Buber rejected such exclusivity and felt that much so-called dialogue was really monologic. Philosophers, he said, were particularly prone to this. 'Many modern ... philosophers have fallen, with the totality of their thought world, into a monologizing hubris' (Buber, 1998, p. 103). In a letter of 1962, he disagrees that Heidegger was involved in a kind of 'permanent dialogue' with 'the great philosophers'. 'Dialogue in my sense implies of necessity the unforeseen, and its basic element is surprise, the surprising mutuality' (Buber cited in Glatzer & Mendes-Flohr, 1991, p. 647). Everyone in school can take part in dialogue. This is, but should not be, a surprise.

The Significance of Surprise for School Students and Teachers

There is much that is reasonable about planning what and how children will learn in school, and about setting explicit learning objectives. In such ways, children can have an appropriate equality of access to elements of the curriculum. Planning and predictability are helpful in giving shape to the child's year, and in allowing siblings, friends and families to support the child's learning. Children moving between schools will have less chance of ending up repeating learning or being lost in unfamiliar learning. For these and many other reasons, careful planning of the curriculum is helpful. The passing on of information will always be vital to education, and this, along with other planned items, can properly be referred to as Buber's 'technical' dialogue, aiming for 'objective understanding' (Buber, 2002, p. 22, quoted earlier). Repetitive practice and rote learning may have a role in such education. There has been a revival in understanding the value of characteristic 'craft' learning, with Sennett's exploration noting the 10,000 hours of repetitive and often solitary practice needed for expertise in a number of fields, such as musical performance, sport, or writing (Sennett, 2008, p. 172). Yet if technical dialogue were all that schools were for, they would be entirely impersonal institutions, and would not provide an education of the whole child – an education in character, a personal, social and spiritual education.

Buber describes the typical twentieth century problem of treating people as 'it', and this is matched by an equally problematic approach to an exclusively private home life of feelings. In modern society, he said, all too often:

Institutions are 'outside,' where all sorts of aims are pursued, where a man works, negotiates, bears influence, undertakes, concurs, organises, conducts business, officiates, preaches. They are the tolerably well-ordered and to some extent harmonious structures, in which, with the manifold help of men's brains and hands, the process of affairs is fulfilled.

Feelings are 'within,' where life is lived and man recovers from institutions. Here the spectrum of the emotions dances before the interested glance. Here a man's liking and hate and pleasure are indulged and his pain if it is not too severe. Here he is at home and stretches himself out in his rocking-chair. (Buber, 1958, pp. 62-63)

This, however, is inadequate, and 'the separated *It* of institutions is an animated clod without soul [a translation of the word "golem"] and the separated *I* of feelings an uneasily-fluttering soul-bird' (p. 63). In such circumstances, institutions would 'know only the specimen' whilst 'feelings only the "object"'; 'neither knows the person, or mutual life' (p. 63). Schools that are golems are machines. They may be efficient machines and, as Buber explains, 'without *It* man cannot live' (p. 52). However, golem-schools lack real dialogue and are inhuman: 'he who lives with *It* alone is not a man' (p. 52). A school that is personal and therefore dialogic does not 'add' the personal to a technical search for truth. The truth, and even more the capitalised Truth, is itself discovered through personal relations. For example, in a close personal relationship such as marriage, 'we touch on the real otherness of the other and learn to understand his truth and untruth, his justice and injustice' (Friedman in the Introduction to Buber, 2002, p. xvi).

A symptom of being a personal, and not golem-like, school is the presence of surprise. The Truth, inevitably, will surprise and shock. Dickinson refers to the Truth's 'superb surprise' (Dickinson, 1970, p. 507, poem 1129, and <http://www.americanpoems.com/poets/emilydickinson/1129.shtml>), in an account of the need to be careful how we tell the truth to children, lest it dazzles them. Buber himself warns of the shock of the truth in his novel about a 'seer':

It was told that, when he was born, he had been able to see from world's end to world's end ... The child who 'saw,' however, was so dismayed by the flood of evil which he beheld engulfing the earth, that he besought the gift to be taken from him and his vision to be restricted to a narrower span. (Buber, 1999, p. 4)

The shock of the truth, and the possibility of dismay accompanying knowledge, was itself embedded in the Jewish religious tradition from which Buber came. Adam and Eve were said to have eaten of the tree of knowledge. After this,

when God asks: 'Where art thou?' [Genesis 3:9 in the Christian Bible] ... Adam hides himself to avoid rendering accounts, to escape responsibility for his way of living. (Buber, 1965, p. 5)

Knowledge can lead to suffering, in the biblical account and in Buber's novel. Education is personal and is not simply a search for understanding, but a transformation of character: this can be painful. The psychologist of education, Salmon, also writes of the account of Adam and Eve, noting that 'we may find that we must buy our knowledge dearly' (Salmon, 1988, p. 20). Truth will surprise: it may not always be a happy surprise, but it will be valuable.

Why would school students benefit from potentially painful surprises? Well, as Buber and Dickinson and Salmon would all say, because that is what education involves, and the only way of avoiding pain or surprise would be to avoid all that is human. Children in school are learning to be human, and not simply learning 'subjects'. Buber's contemporary, Macmurray, writes of how '[w]e may act as though we were teaching arithmetic or history', but '[i]n fact we are teaching people' and '[t]he arithmetic or the history is merely a medium through which a personal intercourse is established and maintained' (Macmurray, 1946, p. 1). School students are making sense of the world, and this *making* is a creative activity. The world they are making sense of, and the humanity they are learning, is changed by them and their very learning. In its newness or originality, it must be surprising. Buber illustrates this with an account of a geography lesson. The lesson would be regarded by most as rather conventional, and it is certainly not full of the kind of spontaneous unplanned activities that make up the stereotype of 'creative' education. A young teacher is facing a class for the first time, asking a question about the Dead Sea: 'What did you talk about last in geography? The Dead Sea? Well, what about the Dead Sea?' (Buber, 2002, p. 134). The question is addressed to a particular school student, one whom the teacher has seen as curious about what the teacher is to bring to him, and the boy 'begins to *tell a story* [emphasis in the original]', describing his visit to the Dead Sea. The boy finishes his account, 'And everything looked to me as if it had been created a day before the rest of creation' (p. 134). This 'surprise' suggests to Buber that the teacher had correctly understood the curiosity of that school student, and in so doing, had given him the opportunity to surprise. The class falls silent and listens.

Connecting books and maps and personal experiences, putting together contrasting concepts, asking difficult questions, all of these are everyday experiences of school students. All are potentially dialogic (with the dialogue being with the writers of books, or with friends and family or classmates, or with teachers), and all can surprise. That the surprise is mutual, for the students and teachers alike, is important to Buber. If teachers only ask questions to which they know the answers, they are unlikely to be surprised, and their students are unlikely to feel that they – the students – are really making sense of the world. Instead, the students will be limited to the necessary but insufficient receiving of information and understanding. Mutuality is similarly important to the learning theorist Wenger, who refers to the 'life-giving power of mutuality', exemplified by 'the miracle of parent-hood' which is for him 'the essence of apprenticeship' (Wenger, 1998, p. 277). Dialogue, in Buber's terms, is also closely related to what Noddings refers to as 'conversation'. It is not the

conversation of Habermas's discourse ethics, which she says 'is more like philosophical processes' (Noddings, 1994, p. 107). Neither is it the 'immortal conversation' within an intellectual or religious tradition – similar, it would seem, to Buber's interpretation, mentioned above, of Heidegger's dialogue with the 'great philosophers'. Instead, Noddings promotes a third kind of conversation, that of 'ordinary conversation'. In this conversation 'the adult participants' (at least) 'must be reasonably good people' and 'must care for the children', and in which '[p]erhaps most significantly of all ... [the] partners in conversation are more important than the topic'. Those in such 'ordinary' conversation 'are not trying to win a debate; they are not in a contest with an opponent' but 'are conversing because they like each other and want to be together' as '[t]he moment is precious in itself' (p. 114). Noddings, like Buber, questions the educational value of 'competitive' conversation. Buber describes 'that curious sport, aptly termed discussion, that is, "breaking apart", which is indulged in by men who are to some extent gifted with the ability to think' (Buber, 2002, p. 3). The conversation described by Noddings and Buber is open and often inconclusive, and must certainly avoid predetermined conclusions. What it will always be is mutually surprising.

Although Noddings and Buber both object to the idea of the 'great conversation' across history, there are genuinely surprising encounters with people not directly present in schools. A dialogic approach to literature, for example, such as that of Bakhtin, allows for a surprising openness in the conversation. Wegerif contrasts this dialogic approach to the more dialectical approach of Hegel or Marx.

Bakhtin associates the ambition to grasp everything with Hegel's dialectic and writes that this attempt to 'erase the divisions between voices' would close down the infinite potential for meaning of dialogue ... He appears to advocate instead what he calls a 'prophetic attitude', always open to the possibility of the 'unexpected'.
(Wegerif, 2008, pp. 358-359)

The pedagogy implied by surprise is one that cannot be limited by predetermined objectives. Some objectives may still be predetermined, but these cannot *limit* the education provided, as '[t]here is bound to be uncertainty' (Barnett, 2007, p. 1). Barnett is referring to teaching in higher education, but his account can also be applied to schools. He writes of a 'pedagogy of air' that 'opens up spaces and calls for a will to learn on the part of the student; to learn even amid uncertainty' (p. 1). It takes courage to live with uncertainty. The teacher's courage is itself a lesson for students: to learn will create new knowledge, and the world will move on and – as in the Adam and Eve metaphor – innocence may be lost. It is that risky, potentially painful, form of education to which Dickinson refers in her account of how Truth may 'dazzle'. Along with courage, teachers allowing for surprise will also be allowing for humour. Indeed, 'the teacher sets an example with her [*sic*] whole self', as Noddings says, 'her intellect, her responsiveness, her humour, her curiosity ...

her care', and '[a]s Martin Buber said, students learn from teachers with whom they work closely something about "the mystery of personal life"' (Noddings, 2003, p. 244).

An example of the professional application of surprise to a relatively formalised aspect of schooling is the work on assessment feedback described as part of the analysis of spirituality in education (Stern & Backhouse, 2011). In that study, 'the possibility of surprise' is identified as a characteristic of dialogic feedback on student work. Examples are given of teachers who show surprise ('I really hadn't thought of that – how interesting!') and of teachers who are open and curious in their feedback ('let me know what you think about this – I'm curious') (p. 339). The research contrasts dialogic and monologic assessment feedback, and is helpful in providing school student and university student views on assessment feedback, as well as the views of teachers and lecturers. It is an example of the 'ordinary' conversations that take place in all schools, and how they can be more or less full of surprise. All this, notwithstanding the formal and controlled nature of assessment processes and policies. Surprise is not significant in school as an alternative to planned or accountable activities, but as an aspect of those very activities.

These Would Be Lost without Surprise

An 'apophatic' description is one that proceeds through negatives, and this is one way of exploring surprise in schools. What would the absence of surprise mean for schooling? The first such absence to be considered is one that Buber himself wrote about: creativity. 'Creation', he says, 'originally means only the divine summons to the life hidden in non-being', but this was later 'carried over ... to the human capacity to give form'. People, in being creative, demonstrate for Buber how 'man's imaging of God is authenticated in action'. It should be understood as universal, as 'the natural activity of the self' and as 'something dwelling to some extent in all men, in all children of men, and needing only the right cultivation'. Being creative involves originality, as it comes from the 'originator instinct'. A person 'wants to make things', and what each 'child desires is its own share in this becoming of things: it wants to be the subject of this event of production' (Buber, 2002, p. 100). In current debates on creativity in schools, being 'original' remains central, even if the link to religious views of creation is rarely made. 'Creativity', for Boden, 'is the ability to come up with ideas or artefacts that are *new, surprising and valuable*' (Boden, 2004, p. 1, emphasis in the original), with the 'value' requiring 'a capacity for critical evaluation' (p. 18). In United Kingdom (UK) government policy, this was expressed well in terms of 'thinking or behaving *imaginatively* ... [and] this imaginative activity is *purposeful*: that is, it is directed to achieving an objective ... [it] must generate something *original* ... [and] the outcome must be of *value* in relation to the objective' (Department for Education and Employment, 1999, p. 29, emphasis in the original). Buber might be contrasted to Boden and the policy quoted here, as he had a stronger sense of creativity as activity and as

something that never ends, rather than as something ending in the made 'object' (as also reflected in Ingold [2010, p. 10] on how to avoid reading creativity 'backwards' from the object). Yet in either of the senses of creativity, if a school were lacking in surprise, it could not therefore be creative, and any creativity in schooling necessitates surprise.

There is an interesting set of relationships between surprise, certainty, hope, and perfection. Schools allowing for surprise would lack certainty. However comforting certainty is, constant certainty would be a problem for education, just as it would be a problem for political freedom. A social psychologist writing in post-war Germany wrote of the problem of 'certainty' in Nazi Germany, and the need to overcome the desire for universal certainty in order to enable the nation to recover from 1945. 'Dogmatic certainty', he said, 'is the end of education ... [and t]he educated philistine is as uneducated as the ignoramus' (Mitscherlich, 1993, p. 14). So a surprising school would be an *uncertain* school: complete certainty would be lost. A surprising school would also allow for hope (which requires uncertainty), so hopelessness would be lost. The completely regulated school, running like clockwork, may have some attractions, but the situation is not only unrealistic but is an enemy of hope. The controlling head teacher character in the film *Clockwise*, finds all kinds of obstacles in the way of his journey to make an important speech. At each point, there seems the narrow possibility that he might still get there, and at one point he says 'I can take the despair ... it's the hope I can't stand' (1986, see also http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_b6mrq1Enrw). Unable to cope with hope, that head teacher's perfect school would also lack surprise, and would be all the more uncreative.

Perfection in adults is damaging to children, as described by Rousseau's contemporary d'Épinay, who 'challenges Rousseau's ideal of the exemplary model-parent ... [as s]he believes that adults need to accept being "good enough" parents rather than "perfect parents"' (Sennett, 2008, p. 102). d'Épinay was followed in this view by the psychologist Winnicott (e.g. 1986), who stressed the harm done to children by perfect parents – giving children no room to develop their autonomy. The same can be said of teachers who, if they know everything (or act as if they know everything) can make education seem closed, uncreative, and dull. Of course, knowing a lot is valuable in teachers: it is real or pretended perfection that would be damaging to pupils in developing their autonomy. Perfection, then, would be lost in a school admitting surprise.

There is a different danger, however, and one that might be the result of the presence, rather than the absence, of surprise. Some who might wish for a creative and surprising school experience might think that repetitive practice of skills should be absent from schools. Sennett, in his account of the history of 'craft' work, says that Aristotle was responsible for reframing the craft worker as a mere 'handworker' (*cheirotechnon*) rather than a publicly-engaged worker (*demioergos*) (Sennett, 2008, pp. 22-23). The dismissal of craft work continues, he says, in many modern education systems. 'Modern education', he says, 'fears repetitive learning as mind-numbing'. Yet avoiding repetitive craft learning

'deprives children of the experience of studying their own ingrained practice and modulating it from within' (p. 38). Repetitive craft skills-work can be framed as a form of Buber's 'technical' dialogue'. However, that might underestimate the nature of the work. Examples of craft work given by Sennett include musical performance, acting, cookery, and a number of other crafts described as 'creative'. Sennett himself is a cellist who had to give up a career in music as a result of injury, and chose sociology instead. He avoids the word 'creativity' as it 'carries too much Romantic baggage – the mystery of inspiration, the claims of genius' (p. 290). Yet his combination of what might be called creativity with repetitive craft work is significant in allowing for surprise and originality emerging from apparently repetitive or rote activities. It also finds an echo in one of the UK's policy-influencers under the Blair government, Barber, for whom '[p]recision and creativity are not opposites ... [but] go together' (Barber, 2007, p. 188). Even 'copying out', a practice that is rejected by many who look to creative and engaging lessons, can be described as spirited. Benjamin writes of the value of copying texts, saying that '[o]nly the copied text ... commands the soul of him who is occupied with it, whereas the mere reader never discovers the new aspects of his inner self that are opened by the text' (1997, p. 50, and see also Wong [2006] on the spiritual significance of the Chinese educational practice of calligraphic copying of classic texts). So skills-based repetitive practice should have a role in schools, and Sennett and Barber would agree that this is needed especially if the school is to be supportive of creativity – and therefore allowing for surprise.

This is (intentionally) a rather negative formulation of the role of surprise in education. Buber insisted that 'it is not the originative instinct alone ... to be "developed"', as '[r]eal education is made possible – but is it also established? – by the realization that youthful spontaneity must not be suppressed but must be allowed to give what it can' (Buber, 2002, p. 104). Suppression is an issue of power. The following section therefore looks, once again, at the positive role of surprise in education, with a focus on power and policy.

Education Policy and Surprise

Why do people ignore the universal experience of surprise, in learning and in teaching? For many in teaching, this will be the result of an understandable – if inappropriate – fear of the unknown. However, it may also be a fear of a lack of control, and this raises the issue of power and, as a means of exerting power, policy. Politicians and policymakers, and all those with power, often wish to demonstrate that they have control and are actually responsible for all that happens in the domain for which they have responsibility. The good things that happen are their responsibility, it is said, whilst the bad things that happen are inevitable and beyond anyone's control. There is a sense of necessity in much that happens, then. This has been rightly debunked by Unger as 'false necessity' (Unger, 2004, title). One response – and this is Unger's response – is to encourage and celebrate the uncertainty of the future and the ability of all, and

not just leaders, to influence the future. This was part of Buber's wish for education, and also for policymakers. It is also his and Noddings' wish for conversationalists. Yet the power of surprise lies in the present as much as in our attitude to the future. Surprise is what we feel in the present, it is the recognition of uncertainty *now*. Governments often promote creativity in school, with a UK minister responsible for education from 2010 confirming what his predecessors from other political parties supported, and writing of his 'appreciation of human creativity' (Gove, 2012). But, as Bottery points out, '[g]iven two decades of a rigorous enforcement of conformity to government dictates, how far do headteachers feel confident of developing creativity in their schools?' (2007, p. 92). If governments prize creativity and prize conformity, which has priority? For those wishing to wield power and exert control, the more likely answer is conformity.

What then of Buber and the necessity of surprise? Some of Buber's writings lead to an impression of communitarian anarchism. His biographer, Friedman, said that 'Buber was not an anarchist', but adds that, '[o]n the other hand, Buber looked for the charismatic and the socially creative in the direct relation between person and person within the society', and Buber, through education (especially adult education), wished to 'generate frameworks of common discourse between different, often disparate, sectors of society' (1999, pp. 414-415). Suissa takes this further in her writing on anarchism and education. She describes Buber's 'considerable sympathy for the social philosophy of anarchist thinkers such as Kropotkin and Proudhon', noting his 'implicit distinction between the social and political order' and 'believing that the way forward lay in a gradual restructuring of the relationship between them' (2006, p. 30). Buber, unlike Kropotkin, was comfortable with the existence of states, but, like Kropotkin, he saw the smaller-scale communities – including schools – as much more significant than states. It is the unpredictability of state power, the inability to 'control', at state level that they agreed upon. Proudhon's contemporary, Darwin, shocked the nineteenth century establishment with his description of evolution without a need for a god-like creator. This was shocking not least because it implied the absence of a need for large-scale centralised planning, to generate what appear to be coordinated environments. Darwin's 'anarchism' involved his description of meaningful living environments having developed through natural selection and without centralised control. This is echoed in Kropotkin – who emphasised the possibility of mutuality in nature as well as in human society (Kropotkin, 1987; de Waal, 2009, p. 32) – and in Buber. And it is worth noting the centrality to Darwin's thesis of mutation: what might be called biological 'surprises'. Without mutation – which would be regarded as a 'mistake', if perfect reproduction were intended – there would be no evolution at all. Surprise has that central role in education: the possibility of surprise is a necessary condition for real education to exist, but if all were surprising (or in biological terms, all reproduction consisted of mutation), then no education – no life – would exist either.

With respect to education policy, the anarchist Proudhon wrote of the need for local control of education, at district level (2004, p. 274). (More recently, Bottery [2004, pp. 24-25], has written of 'ecological leadership', which is another way of describing the necessity of local communal understanding within a national and international context.) As well as being sensitive to the significance of local issues, Proudhon is concerned with 'labour as central to human well-being' (Suissa, 2006, p. 120), and this is another link to Buber's view of humanity as having an 'originator instinct' and of a person as someone who 'wants to make things' and 'share in ... production' (Buber, 2002, p. 100, quoted earlier). Buber's politics are uncomfortable for education policymakers who wish for complete control, just as communitarian anarchist politics are uncomfortable for those same people. Yet unlike the anarchists quoted here, but more in line with Bottery's views, Buber was also conscious of the value of statehood. He was actively engaged in national politics, in binational politics (working for a two-state settlement in Israel-Palestine), and, notably through his correspondence with United Nations Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld (Glatzer & Mendes-Flohr, 1991, pp. 599, 641-642), transnational politics. The implication of Buber's philosophy of education, in prioritising the personal and interhuman, is that government policy on education might be helpful, but it would need to be appropriately limited. That position has recently been promoted by White, when describing UK government policy on the school curriculum. Whereas the government might reasonably describe in outline appropriate aims for schooling, the details of the curriculum should be worked out by teachers. Teachers know, and have a professional responsibility for, their schools and their students (White, 2012, p. 514). It is the position of Lee, too. Just as White writes of aims-based policy, Lee writes of education policy (with respect to universities) as necessarily brief and focused on the 'the point of universities' rather than the detail of their operations. He continues that '[s]ome vice-chancellors ... would love the government to have a clear policy on higher education, whatever its content, so that they could pay homage to it ... [but o]thers, of whom I am one, would prefer the government consciously decide not to have policies on a whole range of life, including lifelong learning' (Lee, 2005). The same might be said of schools.

Knowledge of students and schools, and personal relationships between individuals, are at the heart of Buber's views on education. Policymakers who recognise this, rather than striving for complete control, will allow for and even celebrate the surprises that will be common in such a system. Those surprises may be troubling and they may be advantageous. This is what Buber and Salmon say of learning, and it is also what Darwinians say of mutations. But their absence will leave policymakers likely to suffer the hubris of an ambition that is bound to fail. Buber made surprise the pin with which to burst the bubble of such pride.

Conclusion: dialogic schooling

There are many approaches to dialogue in school. Buber's educational philosophy differentiates the perfectly valuable 'technical' dialogue from the less wholesome monologic 'discussion' and the somewhat grandiose conversation of 'great minds'. All of these, he also differentiates from what he calls *real* dialogue. Real dialogue is what overcomes the golem-like, soulless and mechanical, institutional talk-shop that sometimes passes for schooling. Such dialogue is spirited and original, surprising, creative and therefore genuinely educational.

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