



Narratives of Educational Research: Representations and mis-presentations in a time of interpretation

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Abstract: *This article attempts to establish relations between teaching and learning (actions), education (the institutional level), and educational research. When education is addressed in this text we refer primarily to formal education. The article starts out by presenting some important underlying assumptions for the arguments put forward in this text. Here a reference for the notion of time and history is given. Another aspect of this is that through education a student's capability is attested (one hopes). In the next part, about "Education as an institution of speech acts", we try to show how education is dependent on using words to mediate a just distance (Ricoeur 2000) between generations. The main part of this article, "Making meaning of educational research", discusses the interrelation between reality and facts, what are considered to be facts, and how facts in educational research have to be grasped together into a story, a narrative, in order to make meaning of what education is about. In the last part, we try to connect the fact that education as an institution is itself a refiguration of time and how this plays out in educational research as an obligation to be critical about what is achieved through education, as a debt towards the past. Inherent in this is a criticism of faith in evidence in educational research.*

Keywords: *research methodology, facts and data, interpretation, narration, Ricoeur.*

INTRODUCTION

In order to discuss how meaning is created in educational research we have to connect this to a discussion of what education is for. Education and educational research are tightly bound to each other and their relation needs some elaboration. Everyone has their own specific experiences from their time in school. As humans,

we relate to these experiences in many different ways later in life and in every new experience of education, whether we get these through school, professional development programmes, in relation to our own children, or through the media. Many of us have listened to our parents and grandparents telling us about what they learned and experienced in school, and, as parents, many have been confront-



ed by their own children when they argue according to what they have learned in school today. Through such story-telling and through the experience of listening to stories people establish an understanding of education. The representations of education mediated through story-telling contribute to the narratives of education from one generation to the next. In these processes, some representations are included and others made irrelevant or neglected. What one has to acknowledge is that people's understanding of education cannot be separated from history.

When politicians today talk about education they have a tendency to focus on the content of education as something universal and without a context. In addition, they often use the same globalized perspective to explain the value of education. Universalized subject knowledge is then recognized as a means for a society's economic growth. In this argumentation education is not in itself something that is worth believing in. Instead, economic growth has become the overall belief structure for society and education (Biesta, 2010, 2013). Today, there are policies and practices of beliefs about education proclaiming that internationalization and universalization are the expected true future of education. This article takes a different stance by referring to education and educational research as processes that are historical and embedded in a culture. We thus oppose the idea that the main objective of educational research is to produce evidence of what works in education (Slavin, 2002). More specifically, we

claim that it is required that educational research has to be more aware of how time intervenes in the processes of teaching and learning. To put it briefly, education is always something that predecessors give to their successors through the contemporary generation. However, it raises a question; who is in a position to look into the future and decide what is right for the successors? And from the point of view of research, it raises questions about how the meaning of educational research is related to the figurations of time and space in educational practice. We intend to work with some interpretations of these challenging questions.

UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS

In this text about the function of narratives of educational research, we try to elaborate a way of conceptualizing the relation between education and educational research. The following question is addressed: how is the meaning of educational research related to the refiguration of the temporal experience of education? This question is addressed with a questioning disposition in relation to what it is that creates meaning in education, for whom, and for us as researchers wanting to explore understandings of these configurative operations of making meaning through narration.

We use the concept "narrative" and the relation between narration and temporality in line with the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, known for his theories about the meaning effects connected to



the use of language (Ricoeur, 1981). When one acts something happens, and when using words one also makes things happen. These two different modalities, the act and the speech act, interact. Ricoeur tried to show how language use has to reflect this dynamic aspect of the human condition. This dynamic is an expression of the condition Hannah Arendt named the human condition (Arendt, 1989). To be human means to do things; Arendt distinguishes between three different structures of human activity which she called labour, work, and action. This article will focus on human actions. In speech acts about what one does, action is expressed through the verb. For a long time Ricoeur thought that this dynamics of life could be captured through the living metaphor (*la métaphore vive*) (Ricoeur, 1981). The living metaphor is a way of creating meaning in language which reflects a movement in what happens here and now. Through the metaphor the meaning changed because of the change in a noun. One of the challenges Ricoeur faced was that at this level of semantics, the sentence was not able to capture the larger units of how one understands the movements that action creates. A movement created by action is what makes a change, meaning that actions create what is new, what has not been before. Or, put differently, human actions are not predictable, and from human action one can expect the unexpected (Arendt, 1989). The reference to a temporal experience is a difference mediated by the experience of action, meaning that action has created change. In order to understand the fuller

meaning of a field of actions, these need other mediations through language. In order to capture this, Ricoeur chose to work on the impact of the narrative on human lives (Ricoeur, 1984, 1985, 1988).

In education, as in any other aspect of human life, we try to make meaning of our lives, of what has happened and what may happen in the future. This is one of the reasons why we narrate. Narratives help us refigure and create an understanding of different events in our lives. Ricoeur introduced the narrative in order to relate to the larger units of our systems of symbols in semantics – on the level of genres. He used the idea that it is by exploring narrative configurations, that the refigurations of our actions, the temporal experience is given. Narratives are important for the individual in order for one to make meaning of one's own actions. Personal narratives are connected and confronted with narrations of social interactions from family and friends. When people make everyday narrations, we know that these are embedded in the histories of the long chain of generations that we belong to.

This process of historicity has developed from individual story-telling to the modern construction brought together of history as a reality. The understanding of history as a reality, and the reflection upon this history “brought together in a common concept of history, as history in general” (Kosseleck, 1985, p. 195), is in itself historical. This understanding of history in general no longer refers to God or religion, but to the capacity to produce it, to construct it. Another way of expressing this



historicity is by referring to how the main belief structure of society has changed from the religious beliefs of metaphysics towards human self-recognition of their own human capacity. Kossleck cites Schelling's words from 1798: Man has history "not because he participates in it, but because he produces it" (Kossleck, 1985, p. 196).

The two perspectives on history, the small personal narratives of every individual's connection to the "Umwelt" and the generalized world history explaining overall movements in time, build on two different concepts of the present. We can think of the present as the central position of now, and then think back towards the past or forward towards the future. The central position of the present is then expressed in language through adverbs of time (now, today) and verb tenses where the present is represented precisely through the present tense. This is a positioning of the present as an *origin*. On this basis the contemporaries become a representation of an origin, in other words, a central position in relation to the predecessors who represent the past and the successors who represent the future. There is, however, another representation of the present. This is the present for someone who can be projected or project themselves towards the future with care, and in this are included desire, fear, expectations, and flight. They can be projected towards the past, through memory, regrets, or commemoration. This latter representation of

the present is a *transit*, according to Ricoeur (1994, p. 209). So, if education is conceptualized as the institutionalized organizing of society's transfer of knowledge and ethics from generation to generation, mediated by the contemporaries as an *origin*, it is at the same time, for every adolescent, the move into adulthood as a *transition*.

In this article we also argue for an understanding of education as an institution that mediates the contemporary generation's attestation of the capability of its successors. Through education a successor can become a capable human being and in the position to say: "*I can.*"¹ When knowledge is positioned as a main feature of the development of human capacity, one needs to understand how (subject) knowledge can be distributed to all to the degree where this knowledge is put into real application. A sign of a child becoming an adult is that he has achieved the ability to work and manage his own life. The function of education is to attest to the subject's capability, his ability to take a step forward and say: "Yes, I believe that I can." This, we argue, is a mark of the re-presentation of knowledge from education put into application. Through education, this capacity of the subject can either be attested or rejected: attested if at the end of his education the subject believes he can, and rejected if he leaves education with the idea that he has failed – he knows nothing.²

¹ We have borrowed this term from Paul Ricoeur's capability approach.

² Many former students we have met as educators often describe themselves as dumb, as someone who does not know, who never learned, etc. It is this self-understanding we refer back to this negative attestation or rejection of their capacity.



This process of attestation takes place primarily through institutional mediation. This article proposes that an important expression of education has to encompass this process as an institutionalization that makes a transition from interpersonal bonds between persons to anonymous bonds of relations (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 395). The interaction between generations cannot rely solely on the understanding of the context of the contemporary generation. In the processes leading up to the attestation given to the new generation of its capability, the educational institution has to represent more than the present history. In the course of the article, we hope to show how this has consequences for educational research.

For educational research to create meaning beyond the here and now, it has to address a broader horizon, longer timespans. Through the narrative configuration of time educational research can address teachers' actions in relation to the transfer between generations. This is a crucial task for educational research in relation to the institutionalizing mediations of education. Only a narration can capture the effects of meaning that transcend what can be sensed and experienced in the present. For educational practitioners to be confronted with other representations of their reality and their own experiences and what they understand, they need to be confronted

with other narrations. In education, as a teacher, one is close to the events in the present and it is difficult to make meaning of what happens over longer periods of time. Educational research is in a better position because it operates at a distance from the everyday events in school, in a classroom that a teacher has to take into account.

It is necessary to underscore that this text is about both understanding and explanation in educational research. It is not about the difference between understanding and explanation, but rather about the ways understanding/explanation unfolds in or through the experience of reading or listening to presentations and representations of educational processes – as they are (re)presented in educational research. Hence, this is about how language is used as a medium for referring to something which is not present. The reference to mis-presentation and representation³ is about the way educational research narrates the events of education, the way “reality” is referred to when one speaks or writes about “things” that are currently absent. It is necessary to underscore that this is dealing with acts of language, communication in the form of speaking/listening and writing/reading. For, as Ricoeur states, we must not be confused and think that we live our stories – “stories are not lived, they are told” (Ricoeur, 1994, p. 159).⁴

³ A previous version of this paper called: *Mis-presentations and re-presentations in a time of Interpretation: Embodiment, understanding and text* was presented at ECER 2011 (The European Conference on Educational Research) under network 13: Philosophy of Education.

⁴ His reference for this statement is the American historian Louis Mink.



EDUCATION IS AN INSTITUTION OF SPEECH ACTS

In order to understand the framing of educational research through the narrative, and how this is related to the situated practice of a teacher, let us start by connecting our theme to two different sets of relations. On a primary level, education functions through the relations between teacher and student as relations connecting both participants to their own and others' temporal experience of teaching and learning. This operates on an individual level with knowledge and ethics that need continual mediation of interpersonal forms of otherness. On another level, education functions through relations of institutionalization. Both these functions are re-presented through teachers' actions. When one talks about a teacher, one can see her⁵ both as a person relating to others (pupils, teachers, parents) ethically and as a representative of the institution called education. As a participant, she shares the responsibility and contributes to the shaping of the practice of this institution. This is a way of distinguishing between an institutional level and a level of interpersonal action in education.

At the level of an institution, one is not talking about the mediation of the dialogic relation between individuals. What the face-to-face relation lacks is what is important to mediate through thirdness (institutions) or what Ricoeur calls a third

party. This responsibility of the practice of institutions is related to a different set of relations. When a student has gained the knowledge necessary to live his life freely and competently, this is as an effect of the distribution of knowledge in education. Knowledge has a form which increases when it is shared. This means that the distribution of knowledge is not like the distribution of commodities. It is not part of an economy. The institutionalized distribution of knowledge is related to distributive justice. According to Ricoeur, Rawls (1971) writes at the beginning of his book, *Theory of Justice*: "Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought" (Ricoeur, 2000, p. 8). To comprehend the institutional structure of education is to understand that the distribution of knowledge cannot be based on the logic of supply and demand of a market economy. Education is a right for everyone.

The difficulties entailed by this institutional task attributed to education are immediately apparent. From an individual perspective, every child begins primary school with excitement and hopes of learning and with expectations for the future. From the perspective of society, in human society, education is the social institution that expresses the hope and performance of living and working together. One of the references for this latter perspective is the idea of Hannah Arendt about community as action-in-concert. She refers to this

⁵ In this text we use a feminine reference for the teacher and a masculine reference for the student. They are, of course, meant to represent both genders.



capability to act in concert as something which is developed in a public space (Arendt, 1989). Public spaces express a plurality that extends from the face-to-face of the “I” and “you” to the generalized human being, the third party. For education to distribute knowledge to everyone the social has to be concerned with more than a public space. The institutional mediation of the right to knowledge for all entails reference to a just distribution. This distribution does not refer to solicitude for the person, but to the claim; equality for everyone makes another into each (Ricoeur, 1994, p. 202), meaning that you are a subject equal to everyone else.

The justice of the distribution of knowledge is a vital part of the task for education as the institution that mediates knowledge and ethics from generation to generation, meaning that this institutional function is related to an exercise of power. However, since education and educational research are primarily formed through deliberative speech acts, how can they handle this? Education is an institution of words, not of violence, a place where words are supposed to triumph over violence. But what can be done through words? How can we think that words can mediate a “just distance”? What sort of mediation with words and connection to institutions is necessary to make a reference to impartiality?

Education as an institution is supposed to handle the relation between successors and predecessors deliberatively within society in a way that is characterized by the Ricoeurian concept “just dis-

tance” (Ricoeur, 2000). There is a tension here in the power of the institution to attest or reject the capacity of an individual participant in education (Hoveid & Hoveid, 2009). The types of conflicts that can be found between generations typically consist of indignation with the other, such as indignation with the young ones because they do not take their obligations seriously enough or indignation with the elderly because they never give room for the young person’s responsibility. Do not conflicts such as these and their debates mediate the expectation “*of a word that will create a just distance between the antagonists that will bring an end to their head-on-head confrontation?*” (Ricoeur, 2000, p. xi)? But how can words contribute to the creation of an authentic sense of justice? The obstacle that prevents the conquest of a “just distance” between antagonists about shares, exchanges, or retributions that our indignation condemned as unjust is the desire for vengeance. To overcome this dispute between the antagonists one needs a position which represents an institutionalization, the mediation of a third party. This third party cannot represent any one of the protagonists, and is thus placed on another level than the interpersonal relation of the dispute. Education is the institution that mediates justice and impartiality between generations and between differences within generations. The teacher is a representative of this institution through her acts and for her to mediate this third position, she will need the help of something outside her and her institution. For education to fulfil such



a function it needs a relation to the work of research in order to keep the dialogue between generations alive. To recognize much of the experience of the predecessors, the researcher has to follow the traces that are left and the data that is registered and stored in archives.

MAKING MEANING IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

This text expresses a take on educational research that gives research a specific responsibility towards teaching and learning processes in education. The argument has been that education is an institutionalization of the transfer of knowledge and ethics from generation to generation. In this text, we try to respond to the question of how the meaning of educational research is related to the refiguration of the temporal experience of education. The refiguration of temporal experience in education refers, in relation to the researcher's work with making meaning, to different stages in doing research. In the predominant model of educational research, a researcher gathers data for his/her research. This data is the basis of the research. After gathering the data, the researcher analyses it in order to make new meanings and then he/she writes a representation of the data and the analysis through texts. The acts of meaning-making of research are related to the three different stages in the process of research. They are related to the way the data is selected, to the way the analysis is performed and, last but not least, to the representation through a narrative.

In the predominant model of research, data is usually handled as facts. Facts are something represented because they are not something immediately present. Facts refer to events, something which has happened. They may be selected from archives, statistics, or something told, etc. What is inherent in research is that it is a process in which it is a fact that the facts are not the present, and everything that produces meaning in research is a representation.

Reality and facts, what is given? Is anything given?

When one accounts for the long timespans of educational processes, representations of the past are made. As a researcher, one then needs to take into account what has left a trace, and what can lead to mis-presentations of teaching and learning processes in educational research. In his article "Data Return: the Sense of the Given in Educational Research" Paul Standish (2001) starts out by giving an analysis of the predominant way that the given is presented in models for educational research, where the given is often understood in linear, straightforward, and uncomplicated ways. Through this sort of positivistic empiricism, a "taken-for-granted idea of data" (p. 497) is displayed and the background to the given is not recognized. We follow Standish in his analysis of the current state of much educational research, and we are going to explore and suggest another



way of understanding the background of the given.⁶ In our analysis the given represents an enigma and this is the enigma of “standing for”, which cannot be solved in a unilateral and exhaustive manner (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 144).

Let us then approach some of the challenges connected to representation of the past by discussing some aspects of what we qualify as facts and how facts operate as a reference for research. If we narrow this down to the field of educational research, whether defined as part of the social sciences or the humanities, a difficulty arises – which has become even more visible today because of the renewed emphasis put on the “need” for empirical evidence by many governments and politicians, related to the possibility of reporting **facts** through educational research. This requires us to pause to think and deliberate about what is asked for when one demands facts in educational research. In a fairly uncomplicated manner there are, of course, some statistical facts which can be reported without much difficulty – also from education. For instance, reports on the number of young people who do not complete upper secondary education – with a statistical overrepresentation of boys, we have learned.⁷ So these are the facts, but they do not tell

us much before we start asking questions. What facts from statistics make possible is to pose the problem as a question. There is an overrepresentation of boys who do not complete upper secondary education, but why? One of the impressions evidence-based methods of good teaching, confirmed by research, provide is this notion of a scientifically proven method for education. But how can educational research testify to the validity of such claims? Are there some complications within educational research, operating on all levels of explanation/understanding of teaching and learning processes?

Let us first explore this through an event from the news. Here we will show an example of how the news, as an image of the present, is confronted with the opposite problem: as news the facts are always unreliable. On July 22nd, 2011 Norwegians were attacked in a way nobody had imagined possible before. We were confronted by a new reality that most Norwegians had a hard time to believe was really happening – that it was true. Shortly after the bombing and massacre that killed 76 people in Norway on that day in July, researchers were confronted by the media. They were asked to give their analysis and opinion about what was happening. In the first hours after the bombing, no-one

⁶ Standish argues that “We can draw a distinction between two kinds of giving, one that finds its place comfortably in a circle of exchange, in a self-stabilising economy, and the other alien to exchange, in an *aneconomy* that preserves the pure gift as a giving without return or recompense or recognition. It is the difference between these structures that needs to be explored” (2001, p. 508).

⁷ See, for instance, the EU initiatives on early school leavers: http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/leaving_en.htm. Here it is stated: “In June 2011 the Education Council adopted a Recommendation which proposes a framework for coherent, comprehensive and evidence-based policies against early school leaving.”



knew who did this and it led to speculation in the press. Researchers were interviewed and asked to give an analysis. Following the events of July 22nd, it was time for re-analysis of what had happened and some of this took place in different newspapers. One of the questions posed to researchers is whether they should engage in speculation when there are few facts. Those who, together with the media, speculated on links to Muslim terrorism in the first hours after the bombing argued that the basis they reported on was that they saw a similar pattern to that used by al-Qaida, and we assume that these patterns represent some of the facts they used in the analysis they performed. Professor Øyvind Østerud, head of the Department of Political Science at the University of Oslo, said to *Morgenbladet* (a weekly paper) that researchers have to be very reluctant to make guesses. The commitment to respecting the **facts** is at the core of research, he says: “... *therefore they should have waited till they had the facts.*”⁸

It was argued that some of the speculation in this case was fatal because it fed the Islamophobic narrative, and shortly after the bombing in the centre of Oslo young Muslims were attacked on the streets, while others became scared and hid in their homes, the media reported. Some hours later the fact that both the bombing and the massacre were carried out by a 32-year-old ethnic Norwegian driven by his fear of Muslims were gradually revealed. Professor Østerud says that

research has to respect the facts, meaning, as we read him, that research ought to be based on facts if it truly wants to be research.

We believe all the researchers that were performing analyses in the course of this event felt an obligation to respect facts. Facts are something we have to wait for – we have to wait until we know more. Facts are something from the past known to us in the present. On the basis of facts we can start an analysis, make correlations and connections, and draw patterns of understandings and explanations of social phenomena and events. On the other hand, facts cannot stop researchers from asking questions, and on the basis of facts there is always a possibility of performing another analysis, drawing another connection. “The fact is not the event, ... but the contents of a statement meant to represent it,” Ricoeur writes (2004, pp. 178-179). Therefore, Østerud’s warning about waiting until we have the facts only helps us halfway. Somehow it makes us believe that once we have sufficient facts we can report the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. But this is not possible; there is more than one story to be told about one event and one event may be linked to different sequences of different events that lead to different representations. So there is a balance between what is gained through temporal distance, allowing new facts to appear and giving us distance from the ones we have, and what is lost concerning the proximity of the

⁸ In *Morgenbladet*, (weekly paper), August 5th-11th, 2011, Title: “Analyse i Kaos” (Analysis in chaos).



event. This represents what Ricoeur calls the enigma of “standing for”, which cannot be solved in a unilateral and exhaustive manner (Ricoeur, 1988).

What was so extraordinary about the event that happened on July 22nd was that it did not follow an expected pattern of interpretation. Researchers tend to expect a prolonging of tradition. This is called a performative confirmation of the construct of knowledge of human behaviour. This is something which poses a challenge within educational research. Educational research should not be a reporting about what could be expected from wo/man but about that which is unexpected. What is expected in educational research is the representing of knowledge we already have. What makes educational research interesting is the meanings that appear because of grasping together some unexpected facts.

When we read about the hopes, wants, and needs of education as they are presented by the student, the teacher, or the politician, we feel that there is this pressure to make a factual, objectified representation of what education is (Biesta, 2010; Slavin, 2002). On the other hand, we can conclude that all representations of education created along these lines are disputed. There are several different ways to explain and understand the complexity of education through educational research. At the same time, we argue, there are some aspects to educational research all researchers have to acknowledge. As we started off by say-

ing, we believe that first of all we have to acknowledge that education cannot be separated from history. For education to express such temporality, we propose that the basic elements of education are the processes of teaching and learning in history. This means that we refer to something which cannot be captured as singular acts or events. Educational processes are extended in time, and structured in timespans which are continuous and discontinuous (Ricoeur, 2004). They are expressions of institutionalized mediations of values, knowledge, and practices from the predecessors, through the contemporaries to the successors. This is why the basic element of education can never present itself as a fact, and educational research will never represent education through a representation of such an “unmediated” sign. This must not lead us to believe that facts are unimportant in educational research. Facts will always be used as a base for those texts representing events that represent teaching and learning processes in educational research. Educational research is a form of narration and the act of recognizing a plot, and therefore it concerns educational research. Ricoeur has borrowed the notion of a “configurational act” from the historian Louis O. Mink, who writes about the “grasping together” of facts into a story (Mink, 1970, 1972). In the configuration of facts into a story, for instance a meaningful text of educational research, we have to acknowledge that facts will never cease to appear in the investigation or, to put it different-



ly, that through the research of a given event, there is always the possibility of new questions to be asked, new facts to interpret – but a researcher can decide to rest his/her case.

This criticism of faith in evidence in educational research challenges the notion that it is possible to produce factual evidence in educational research which could inform the workers in education, teachers, about what is right or what the good deeds are in teaching and learning processes. What is right and what the good deeds are in educational practice cannot be produced and attested in a simplistic and straightforward way. Facts do not carry any meaning until questions have been asked and these questions have been read – interpreted – problematized. Therefore, questioning what it is right to do in education concerning the mediations performed by the contemporaries between the predecessors and the successors is not defined by facts, it is created by meanings at another level and this again relates to the three different stages in the work of research mentioned above.

This discussion about the relation between facts and reality has brought the notion of standing for in educational research. If facts do not represent meaning until they have been interpreted it does not abolish all relations between what happened (reality), some facts (data), and the interpretation (research), but it requires a further elaboration of the notion of “standing for”, meaning: what do those facts “stand for”?

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IS NOT ABOUT REPORTING NEWS, BUT TO REMIND EDUCATION ABOUT REMEMBERING WHAT IS MEMORABLE

To educate is always to educate in a certain context and in history. Educational research has to connect to this “reality of education”. In fact, education is an institutional reference connecting what has been, as a representation, a “standing for” for the successors. The notion of “standing for” is a concept which Ricoeur elaborates in *Time and Narrative 1-3* (1984, 1985, 1988) and furthermore in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004). Representation is a power to bring to our attention something that happened in the past. “Indeed,” writes Ricoeur (1988, p. 157): “*only historians can, absolutely speaking, be said to refer to something “real”, in the sense that that about which they speak was observable to witnesses in the past.*” And he continues:

“To say that a given event reported by a historian was observable by witnesses in the past solves nothing. The enigma of pastness is simply shifted from the event reported to the testimony that reports it. Having-been poses a problem in the very fact that it is not observable, whether it be a question of having-been of event or the having-been of testimony. The pastness of an observation in the past is not itself observable but it is memorable” (ibid).

Ricoeur works on this enigma by elaborating the concept of standing for or taking-the-place-of and he wanted to signify by this that the constructions



of history are intended to be reconstructions answering the need for a *Gegenüber*. *Gegenüber* is a concept Ricoeur borrows from Karl Heussi (a German professor of Church History), to which standing for is a correlate, and through this historical knowledge tries to “correspond in an appropriate manner” (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 143). With this use of Ricoeur’s concept of standing for we have entered into the problem of what Ricoeur calls “*the mimetic value of the trace and, beyond this, to the feeling of a debt to the past*” (ibid).

We have tried to show a connection between education and educational research in this text. A crucial task for educational research is to pay special attention to the long timespans where education as a process of attestation of the capable human being takes place. Education as an institution mediates between generations, and, as we have already written, it represents an organizing of society’s transfer of knowledge and ethics.

We have shown two different understandings of the present operating in education, as an *origin* and as a *transit*. Reporting news from an event – being an eyewitness – is reporting about what is happening here and now. This notion of the present, actualized when reporting news, cannot be made applicable when it comes to educational research. Reporting what happens in a classroom or, for instance, about shootings at a school, here and now, has little meaning in terms of what education is for; rather, these are signs about the function or malfunctions of education. Education refers to processes happening over longer times-

pans, generations. An immediate picture of a here and now can only serve as a sign which we have to connect to other signs and thereby try to make meaning of what is happening in these longer timespans of the processes of teaching and learning between generations. For instance, if we address this from the perspective of the present as a *transit*, the news of a shooting at a school, if we use this act of violence as an example, represents a crossroads between the function of educational institutions as institutions of words and the just distribution of knowledge and ethics. The facts reported in the news about such a violent act seldom refer this back to the reasonableness of education. Such a momentary act of violence in education is also a sign of a mis-function of the institution of education that needs research.

To conclude the article, we will sketch some arguments that have the following implications: there is a necessary implication for education that educational research makes representations of the longer timespans of teaching and learning processes. These are representations of what has been, and they will be played out dialectically between the standing for as a debt to the past and the horizon of expectations.

Educational research representing refiguration of time in an institution – Education

Educational research represents education as a text standing for something “real”. When we say that processes of teaching and learning are events in time and space,



we underline that education as a number of events of teaching and learning continuously is in a process of change. The process of change happens within all the different areas of education, and the implication for educational research is that it also has to reflect itself as an activity internal to time. This does not only imply that we have to think of educational research in terms of historical knowledge, but rather that one has to think about the enigma of how educational research makes something “standing for” the “reality” of education as a reality of the institution – education.

So what education is about has to do with a “reality” one can only grasp if one addresses it through longer timespans. Education takes place in time, so what has happened, what happens, and what will possibly happen in the future in some way blend together in education and creates what constitutes its meaning. In the here and now of education teachers act and respond to the actions of others in a way that does not allow a distance from what is happening. This is the nature, so to speak, of teaching and learning processes, and as a teacher, one has to abide by this. What education is for does not easily appear in the here and now; it is revealed over time and fulfilled in the final attestation of a student as a capable human being. This signifies that for the student education has to do with a transition from childhood to adulthood. His experiencing of his time in school is always unique to him, and if the education was successful, if it attests his capability, it has given him this belief in himself.

For the teacher to act not only as another trustworthy person in relation to the student, but also as a representative of an institution, education, which can give this attestation, the teacher needs help to mediate a distance, help which can only be achieved from a third-person position. It is the responsibility of educational research to take this position. It can do this more easily because it is not tied up in the everyday actions of teaching and learning processes. It can claim this position of the third person who can be an observer. Addressing the longer timespans in education is a challenging task because nothing is given directly without several mediations. Gathering facts, analyzing, and grasping this together in a narrative is not an innocent practice. In doing so one contributes to the production of a history of what education is about. If this story were only a story about what was successful, how every child became a capable human being, this would have been easy. As we have argued, not everyone receives this attestation through education; some are rejected. When Ricoeur writes about a *feeling of debt to the past* we interpret this as a debt that contemporaries have in relation to their predecessors. Making meaning of educational processes is made by the grasping together of facts into a story. In these narrations, there is also an important critical aspect of doing educational research, meaning that it also has to include accounts of those characters in the stories which did not succeed, those who were rejected. Education is not always successful and as a reminder and a debt to



those who were not attested as capable, educational research has to pay respect, in order to be true to what education is for – a just distribution of knowledge. In order to achieve “real” understanding we have to educate ourselves, and this is where educational research can contribute, for instance in order to achieve some distance from our first feelings and reactions – demanding vengeance.

We have tried to build an argument for a link between education and educational research. We have thereby tried to support a mediation through language

use and narration that supports understanding and explanations of actions and their motives and to “reinforce the description of action as that which makes ‘something’ happen” (Ricoeur, 1994, p. 64). We have also tried to relate acts of researching about the acts of teaching and learning to those parts of epistemology where we construct meaning by grasping together concepts at another level of language. This level of language, more like a narration about “something that occurs” without reference to persons or actions, is itself a construct of understanding/explanation.

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