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*The 'Bashing' of Educational Research*

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## Confero: Essays on Education Philosophy & Politics

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## The ‘Bashing’ of Educational Research

*Johan Forsell, Lina Rahm,  
Elisabeth Tenglet & Simon Wessbo*

**F**or this special issue on *the Bashing of Educational Research*, we invited contributions from scholars with various disciplinary background to debate contemporary and historical issues in relation to contemporary public critique of education, educational research, knowledge production, pedagogy, didactics, philosophy and politics.

The term ‘bashing’ commonly refers to a verbal attack of something, often conducted in a violent way. It may also signify “the concept of saying rude things about a certain subject over the Internet”, as a user on the website *Urban Dictionary* put it. This is not to be confused with criticism. Criticism of research is necessary; something immanent and ubiquitous in the system of research and science. But the bashing of *educational research* is perhaps something new—at least as it is expressed on various media platforms, in new contexts, by different people.

One reason behind this surge in the ‘bashing of educational research’ might be that educational research is a discipline that is expected to offer solutions to all problems associated with schooling. In Sweden, for example, education should, according to the Education Act (2010:800 5 §), be founded on a scientific basis and proven experience. As such, the alleged “school crises” (for

example, students not performing as desired in international tests and comparisons, or the complaint that education is failing to solve contemporary societal problems etc.) have in turn raised questions about the relevance and value of the academic field of education. As evidence, reference is often made to the fact that educational research (again, allegedly) fail to produce usable knowledge on the “best ways to teach” or, for that matter, on any issue of practical importance to teachers and students.

Further, the research field is also accused, at least in the Swedish media, as well as by other scientific disciplines, of distorting “real knowledge” and “real facts” in favour of schooling programs oriented around “political equality”, which puts certain *methods* ahead of knowledge. Consequently, researchers in education are described as uninterested in studying how schools and education *should* be organized on a scientifically proven basis, and precisely because of this, scholars in education are also described as the ones poorest equipped to provide the education of teachers. At times, the field of education science is even accused of being harmful for education in practice.

With this in mind, this special issue of *Confero* encouraged contributions that approached and analysed contemporary and historical criticism of educational research. The result is six essays with different aims and scope, but which together form a dialogue on the underpinning perspectives on science and learning, not only in the field on education but academia at large. To clarify, the intention of this issue is not to constrain the critics, but an ambition to deepen the conversation and open up for different perspectives and voices.

In the lead essay to this issue, Martin Malmström explores both the personal and political consequences of the ubiquitous mass media criticism of the field of education. In the essay “How Do You Think It Feels? On Being the Epitome of Pseudoscience” a unique and rare perspective is presented. Malmström share his important, personal, and interesting story from the inside of being bashed on. In the essay he tells his story of how he finished his dissertation, which then came to be discussed in Swedish

newspapers as an example of low quality and useless educational science. One of the main issues that the debate of Malmström's dissertation brought up is about in what way educational science is of any use. Malmström's antagonists claim that educational science should focus on how students can become better learners or how teachers can become more competent. From this perspective it is important that research is evidence-based and that the results can show significant effects. Now, since a lot of educational research do not fulfil these criteria, the conclusion, from this point of view, is that educational research is in danger. This raises questions of how we value research. What is good research and what is bad research? To what extent should educational research benefit the discipline of pedagogy? In what way can, on the other hand, research gain from a cultural perspective and problematize ideas that are taken for granted?

”There is snobbery in higher education research and everyone knows it”<sup>1</sup>. This quote is taken from Eric Blair's essay “Rebundling higher educational research, teaching and service”. Blair suggests that teaching and service has become separated from research. Traditionally, lecturers in higher education have had both the role of teachers and of researchers, but today it is more common that some teach and others do research. This separation has also isolated these two practices from each other and consequently research in educational science has become an easier target for bashing. Moreover, Blair concludes that there is also a difference in status between researching and teaching, where teaching has lower status. This is deplorable not only for those who teach, it is also a loss for all the students at universities who may never get access to all the research and knowledge that may exist within their own department, but where, unfortunately, researchers are aloof or uninterested to teach and share what they know. But Blair has a cure:

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<sup>1</sup> Blair, 2018, p. 44

Instead, it is proposed that rebundling the three core aspects of higher education - research, teaching and service – would allow for a more holistic conception of academic identity where the various components work together to offer a more robust, and less ‘bashable’, academic identity.<sup>2</sup>

In the next essay, Ansgar Allen and Emile Bojesen provide an account of an original and somewhat provoking perspective on education in their essay “The Economic Problem of Masochism in Education.”. The authors state “Educational researchers are not above nor insulated from what they critique”. Using a theoretical framework emanating from an essay by Sigmund Freud, they examine the masochistic tendency in education and gives a thorough example—a new reading—via the film *Dead Poets Society*. Seeing how most of us in the editorial board have a teaching background and teach regularly at universities, as well as having some of our projects concerning education per se, the questions raised by Allen & Bojesen becomes challenging. A lot of educational research confirms a picture of education and schooling that is deeply problematic. Why is that? As the authors state: “In addition to providing lengthy disquisitions explaining what all educators already feel, and have long felt more acutely—namely, transposing into writing a sense of the ‘shitiness’ of things—educational research helps sustain what it bemoans”<sup>3</sup>. As such the text illustrates how bashing can take many forms. Thus, the authors pinpoint a mechanism in educational research, and education as a whole, that calls for attention and reflection.

In the next essay, entitled: ”Slow Science: research and teaching for sustainable praxis”, Petri Salo and Hannu L.T. Heikkinen examine the slow science movement as an alternative way forward for academia. A route that firmly steers away from the ‘McDonaldization’ of the academic lifestyle. Salo and Heikkinen link the current paradigms of fast policy in education to academic and cognitive capitalism in the ‘corporatisation’ of universities, where “The pressure of effective production, combined with the

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<sup>2</sup> Blair, 2018, p. 35

<sup>3</sup> Allan & Bojesen, 2018, p. 56

fragmentation of academic work processes, results in temporal alienation and superficiality, both in terms of academic handicraft and the social interactions included in it”<sup>4</sup>. *Slow science* on the other hand calls on researchers to reflect and problematize the foundation for research in current times, and the effect it produces. As such, the essay presents an urgent alternative, not only to toxic forms of academic management, research and teaching, but also as a defence of a sustainable life world.

Returning to the academic practises: why is there such a striking discrepancy between flexibility, democracy and empowerment (that the Bologna process aims for) and the superficial educational activities that it actually results in? This question is the point of departure in an essay by Sverker Lundin, Susanne Dodillet and Ditte Storck Christensen, entitled: “Ritual, reform and resistance in the schoolified university. On the dangers of faith in education and the pleasures of pretending to taking it seriously”. The authors present an analysis of *schoolified* education as a normalized ritual. Focusing on the teacher education programme, the authors show how the implementation of the Bologna protocol can lead to its direct opposite: an inflexible body of education which students and teachers have very little influence over. By applying the concept of *rituals* to education, the authors show how the fixed ‘message’ of education can be made visible and thereby subjected to further scrutiny. The promise of this message is a promise of ‘sanctified’ knowledge. But what the schoolified education as a ritual in turn produce is rather the ‘acting’ out of certain (desired) knowledge, performed at different levels in education. External measures such as curricula and regulations, as well as students and teachers, thus “create a machine-like ‘show’ of something taking place, which is teaching and learning.”<sup>5</sup> This contribution clearly illustrates how schoolified education is self-referential as well as concurrently, and rather effectively, hiding the gap between reality and appearance.

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<sup>4</sup> Salo and Heikkinen, 2018, p. 100-101

<sup>5</sup> Lundin, Dodillet and Christensen, 2018, p. 124

The closing essay in this special issue is “Resentment, disappointment and the ceaseless vitality of teachers and pedagogy – An essay” by Moira von Wright<sup>6</sup>. In this essay, the topic of this issue, “The ‘Bashing’ of Educational Research”, is presented through the personal and intriguing narration of being confronted by critical attitudes towards teaching, education and educational research. From the story of being a teacher confronted by a hairdresser on the topic of education, to the story of being a researcher ‘condemned’ by a Swedish Newspaper as ‘anti-intellectual’. Through these narrations, von Wright discusses the link between scientific critique and public frustration, which could be both understandable and healthy but which could also run the risk of neglecting ‘the ground-breaking potential of education’ (in favour of more stringent traditions, e.g. scientism). By describing the potential of education, this essay argues for the value of educational research, which is put in contrast to more authoritarian and totalitarian - also making teaching and learning more ‘effective’ - prospects on education.

Having summarized the essays for this issue we would also like to provide the reader with a brief background of the journal *Confero* as such.

*Confero* started as a cooperative attempt by a group of Swedish doctoral students to form a critique against the emerging regime of the scientific economy of publications and citations, as well as the templates of mass article-production.<sup>7</sup> With this in mind, we can conclude, five years later, that our most downloaded article is an essay from the first issue, entitled: *Managing your Assets in the Publication Economy*, written by the bibliometrician, Ulf Kronman. As such, ambition and result does not always coincide.

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<sup>6</sup> von Wright, 2018, p. 145


<sup>7</sup> See *Confero* Volume 1, Issue 1, 2013:

<http://www.confero.ep.liu.se/contents.asp?doi=10.3384/confero.2001-4562.13VII>

However, *Confero* will keep on keeping on being a critical friend in the contemporary ‘publication economy’. A scientific journal that aims to provide essays that do not stay faithful to the hegemonic format of a ‘scientific article’. And as a peer-reviewed open access journal, available for free to people engaged in social science research as well as a wider intellectual public.

Essays can be written from a wide range of theoretical perspectives and academic traditions. We particularly welcome a broad range of empirical sources, used to explore an issue or phenomenon at hand: unconventional sources such as art works, pictures, movies as well as conventional empirical material like interviews, ethnographies or statistics.

Dear authors of this special issue and dear reader, we hope you will enjoy this issue as much as we have, and we look forward to your forthcoming contributions.

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# How Do You Think It Feels? On Being the Epitome of Pseudoscience<sup>1</sup>

*Martin Malmström*

**I** imagine you have just written a dissertation into which you have invested the lion's share of the last five or so years.<sup>2</sup> After many late nights and a great deal of self-doubt, you have finally put an end to it. It turns out the newspapers are interested, since your theme obviously has some news-value. You have chosen a subject which stirs emotions, it seems. To the best of your knowledge you have tried to make the journalists not distort what you say. But at "The University Leak" (Högskoleläckan), a Facebook site where academics and others discuss, if that be the term, academic issues, you have been bashed for various reasons by people who have, at best, read your abstract. You are said to make too much of the empirical material, or – well, just imagine – someone claims you do not have any empirical material. Your research is described as the worst kind of postmodern pseudoscience.

But now it is summer. You have stopped reading "The University Leak" – why wouldn't you? – and, after a time of doubting whether or not you want to take part in the rather infantile war between the sciences, you have decided to try to make it a go in the insecure and (in your opinion) somewhat deceitful academic world. The interest for what you have achieved has waned, and,

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Katarina Blennow and Ingrid Bosseldal for valuable feedback.

<sup>2</sup> Malmström, 2017.

quite frankly, you are rather pleased. Just as for William Stoner, being in the limelight was never a goal for you. Spurred by curiosity, you just wanted to investigate a phenomenon you found strange and rather disturbing.

Then, in the middle of your vacation, you get to know that in one of the nationwide morning papers your dissertation has been used as a typical example of unnecessary, expensive educational research, which is of no significance whatsoever, since it is not an intervention study in which the effects of a specific teaching method is analysed.<sup>3</sup> The article is the start of a debate of the needlessness of educational sciences. Could you see it coming?

I, for sure, could not. But this is what happened, more or less (to paraphrase Vonnegut). It has been emotional. I suppose I was not prepared for being questioned for the design of the study and its theoretical underpinnings rather than the results. I was astonished by the ferociousness and contempt of some of the comments. I was uncomfortable with being accused of doing useless research. Anyway, writing this piece has been cathartic. That said, it is a personal text.

Be that as it may, after analysing and describing the incident I try to come up with an interpretation of the reception of the dissertation. In this essay, I will therefore also make an effort to bring some understanding to some burning issues: How did we end up here? Why all this talk about effects and evidence? What is the origin of the evidence movement? What effects do talk about effectiveness in education have?

In the next part, I use the demeaning article mentioned above as a springboard to discuss what was brought up in the debate. But first I will dwell on some of the results of my dissertation, since it pretty much captures the script of media debates about education. And, I would claim, the article itself illustrates the phenomenon pretty well. In the final part, I discuss some reasons for educational

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<sup>3</sup> Enkvist, 2017.

sciences being continuously bashed and what might happen if we listen too readily to the siren calls of the evidence movement.

## **Educational Sciences at Risk**

To give an idea of what the article mentioned above criticised, it might be a good idea to give an account of some of the major findings in my dissertation. The dissertation consists of two major empirical sections, both of which related to the view of writing. One is devoted to media debates and one to Swedish curricula for upper secondary school. In this essay, I will focus on the media debates. I analysed what has been said about student writing in media debates in the seventies, the nineties and the present.

I would assert that it was probably the contents in the dissertation as well as what was actually criticised that really mattered in the debate that followed. As a background to the debate, in the next section I discuss media debates on student writing, which is the part of the dissertation that received the most public interest. This was to be expected, since analyses of curricula normally do not trigger media coverage. Subsequently, the article is scrutinised. Among other things, it blamed educational science for not dealing with matters of real importance, such as what works in the classroom.

## **Perpetual Writing Crisis**

In 2013, nine historians wrote an article about their students' lacking writing abilities.<sup>4</sup> The article went viral. It was mentioned in media of all sorts: broadsheets (well, what used to be broadsheets), tabloids, radio documentaries and morning TV shows. The original article was rather sober in tone, but the authors also made presuppositions about students' knowledge and skills based on emotions: "Most students not having any basic

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<sup>4</sup> Enefalk, Andersson, Aronsson, Englund, Novaky, Svensson, Thisner, Ågren and Ågren, 2013.

knowledge in our own field, history, is a fact we have accepted”.<sup>5</sup> Many of the assertions realise a categorical modality: “Among the students who come to us directly after upper secondary school, a majority have language problems”.<sup>6</sup> Media texts habitually make interpretations of complex events into ‘facts’, for instance by using categorical modalities.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, the articles are true to the genre, but the effects of modality should not be underestimated; categorical modality gives an impression of certainty.

In the intertextual chain, the propositions about students were treated as truth. Students cannot write... or read... or think. In an interview, one of the authors of the original article claimed that the students were not able to understand the argumentative article the historians had written: “They simply do not understand what it says”.<sup>8</sup> This statement made an editorial writer exclaim: “We are talking about a newspaper article of a few hundred words. It is deeply depressing”.<sup>9</sup> In another article, a scholar compared the cognitive abilities of the students with those of 13-year-olds.<sup>10</sup> The students were ascribed a collective identity and their voices were only heard in a small number of the articles. The debaters often used anecdotes, which functioned as local legends, to create consternation and reaction. In quite a few of the articles, the decay was said to be worse than ever, and it was claimed to have become perceptible just a few years earlier.<sup>11</sup>

Little did the historians nor the other authors of crisis articles know this was old news. (Paradoxically enough, as the quote above illustrates, the historians stressed they had to put up with their students not having any historical knowledge.) Lamenting the

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<sup>5</sup> Enefalk et al, 2013 (my translation). In Swedish, the sentence has an initial that-clause, which expresses presupposed content. According to Fairclough (1992, p. 121), [p]resuppositions are effective ways to manipulate people, because they are often difficult to challenge”.

<sup>6</sup> Enefalk et al, 2013 (my translation).

<sup>7</sup> Fairclough, 1992, p. 160f.

<sup>8</sup> Hagberg, 2013 (my translation).

<sup>9</sup> Linder, 2013 (my translation).

<sup>10</sup> Samuelsson, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Hagberg, 2013; Samuelsson, 2013.

writing abilities of the young is at least an almost century-old custom.<sup>12</sup> Mike Rose even has a name for the attitude that it is worse than ever and that the decay started just a while ago: *the myth of transience*.<sup>13</sup> If only we do this or that (most often going back-to-basics), the problems will be solved in one year, or five, or possibly a generation. Neither did the historians know they were writing in a good old genre – the writing crisis genre.

One of the findings in my dissertation is that there is actually a specific writing crisis genre with some particular characteristics. According to Ledin, there are four criteria for a genre.<sup>14</sup> First, it is a social activity, which means patterns of production and consumption are important. The producers as well as consumers of writing crisis articles seem to belong to a discourse community whose members have approximately the same middle-class background. Second, the genre needs to be named. To my knowledge, the writing crisis genre has not been identified previously. This does not mean it did not exist before, only that it was not recognised as such. Third, the genre is dynamic, which would imply that it changes over time. In my material, it became obvious that there was a change in the genre in the nineties. At that time, many debaters started using surveys of different kinds to support their ideas, either small-scale studies of one school that were generalised to represent all of Sweden or large-scale studies such as IEA or TIMSS. When I analysed the studies, I could show that the debaters interpreted the studies wilfully, though. They did not give the whole picture or came up with ill-founded solutions.<sup>15</sup> My interpretation of the surveys being used in the nineties is that New Public Management ideas of measurement had reached

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<sup>12</sup> Andersson, 1986.

<sup>13</sup> Rose, 1985.

<sup>14</sup> Ledin, 2001.

<sup>15</sup> A telling example is when a politician stated that the results of a writing study showed that schools were too kind to students who lacked the basic skills. They needed, he asserted, to be kept an extra year to “rub in” the basics (Jällhage, 1999, my translation). In an essay attached to the study, the scholar who constructed it, though, envisions a Swedish subject where “today’s mechanic skill practice is excluded”, i.e. the opposite of the cure suggested by the politician (Allard, 1999, p. 94, my translation).

debates about school by then. In the 2013 debate, it was back to normal again, i.e. taken for granted ideas about a writing crisis without the slightest support; the school crisis had been pronounced so eagerly for the last decade, not least due to mediocre PISA results, that no evidence for a writing crisis was needed. Everyone just knew. Global rankings are telling, after all. Fourth, the genre consists of some specific traits. In the writing crisis genre, the *paratexts* are often drastic and exaggerated. Genette describes the paratexts as the threshold to a text. The paratexts are for instance images, headlines, introduction and words in bold type, which draw attention to the reader as he or she flips through the paper (or web page).<sup>16</sup> A headline from 1976 read “The Fall of Language”.<sup>17</sup> Another article, from 2013, was titled “The Wordless Generation”.<sup>18</sup> Another trait, obvious from the headlines given as examples, is a prophecy of doom. Increased time for the subject Swedish in school is a prerequisite for the welfare state to live on, as one author proclaims.<sup>19</sup> Another is worried that there will be scribes in the street corners in the future unless we start teaching the basics again.<sup>20</sup> As if we ever stopped.<sup>21</sup> Closely linked with the sense of doom is seeing the past in a nostalgic light. When the golden era occurred is either obscured or, appropriately, at around the time the author went to school him/herself. Often these ideas are woven into anecdotes about days long gone or contrasted with anarchic life in present day classrooms. Articles written in the writing crisis genre often have quotes or mock-quotes, authentic or made up examples of poor language use, most often surface errors, taken out of context, which makes it hard for the reader to know whether they are actually telling or cherry picked.<sup>22</sup> The writing crisis genre is probably universal. It is for instance evident in the material I

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<sup>16</sup> Genette, 1997.

<sup>17</sup> Johnsson, 1976 (my translation).

<sup>18</sup> Hagberg, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Nettekvik, 1993.

<sup>20</sup> Johnsson, 1976.

<sup>21</sup> Evidence to the contrary can be found, for instance in Bergman, 2007; Bergöö, 2005; Brodow, 1976; Dahl, 1999, Malmgren, 1992.

<sup>22</sup> For examples, see Malmström, 2017.

analyse from the U.S. One example is the widely spread article “Why Johnny Can’t Write”, published in *Newsweek* in 1975, read by millions of people and spread to numerous countries. In the article, we get to know that “[w]illy-nilly, the U.S. educational system is spawning a generation of semiliterates”.<sup>23</sup> The crisis rhetoric was even more demagogic and stormy in the report *A Nation at Risk* from 1983, authored by a consortium appointed by the government, which cautioned about “a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people”.<sup>24</sup> In Britain, the *Black Papers*, published from 1969 to 1975, were “a series of right-wing populist pamphlets which mounted a trenchant critique of all aspects of progressive and comprehensive education”.<sup>25</sup> One of the major themes – the two others being indiscipline and unruly left-wing teachers – was the idea that academic standards were in decline, particularly standards of literacy and numeracy. According to many commentators, the decline of basic skills could explain Britain’s economic decline – despite the fact that there was no clear evidence of decline in standards and even some counter evidence of no decline.<sup>26</sup> But this *discourse of derision*, as Ball would have it, was massive and effectively silenced other possible voices.

How, then, can the perpetual writing crisis be interpreted? One point that can be made is that there are constantly new and higher demands of literacy in society.<sup>27</sup> Rising societal demands suggests the myth of deterioration can prevail. Another important fact is that there has been a massive student expansion in Sweden and the western world during this period. Groups that used to be marginalised have got access to higher education.<sup>28</sup> There is also

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<sup>23</sup> Sheils, 1975.

<sup>24</sup> Gardner, 1983, p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Ball, 2006, p. 27.

<sup>26</sup> Ball, 2006, p. 28.

<sup>27</sup> According to Graff (1979), the demands are however exaggerated. His concept the literacy myth implies that “literacy is [in contemporary popular discourse] represented as an unqualified good” leading to “progress and happiness” (2010, p. 640).

<sup>28</sup> Askling, 2012.

the loss of status and prestige of the new class of intellectuals, the professional-managerial class that appears first and foremost in the 20th century.<sup>29</sup> It gets its authority by the language, the culture of critical discourse, as Gouldner refers to it. For that reason, education is important, but as more and more people get access to higher education, some of the status and power of the intellectual class is decreased.<sup>30</sup> According to Williams, the cultural capital is the only way for the intellectuals to distinguish themselves from the masses. This is why the alleged crises so often concern linguistic etiquette; what angers the most seems to be surface errors in student texts.<sup>31</sup> In line with this thought is the fact that the university professor, due to NPM principles and marketisation of higher education, has been deskilled and is more or less an exchangeable labourer who has to fight hard for authenticity.<sup>32</sup> Ball describes a kind of value schizophrenia that may arise if engagement and experience have to be sacrificed to pressures of performance.<sup>33</sup> Finally, the crisis outbursts could be seen as anxiety of the passing time, thus the myths of the fall of civilisation and the golden era. In liquid times, language may appear as the only thing constant to hold on to. But since languages indeed develop, it becomes the task of mother tongue education to keep language (and social) change at bay.<sup>34</sup> A thankless task, no doubt.

The crisis rhetoric is massive in all the different time periods I analyse. There is a popular discourse of writing constructed of a number of myths about writing. A myth empties a text of its historical context and fills it with timeless ideological content.<sup>35</sup> In this sense, it affects emotions and perceptions of the addressee, rather than inform. The myth is manipulative, since it makes subjective notions become naturalised and taken for granted. Those taken-for-granted facts are pronounced over and over, to

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<sup>29</sup> Gouldner, 1979; Ehrenreich, and Ehrenreich, 1979, 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Gouldner, 1979, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Williams, 2007.

<sup>32</sup> Ball, 2004.

<sup>33</sup> Ball, 2004, p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> This interpretation is more elaborated in Malmström, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Barthes, 1972.



the effect that ideas about the constant failure of school are created. There is a risk that the crisis rhetoric becomes almost hegemonic. Even though it might be *possible* to voice alternative ideas, those who do run the risk of being derided and belittled.

## Educational Research as the Reason for Educational Shortcomings

My dissertation and its reception illustrate that, on the one hand, it is possible to voice alternative ideas, but, on the other hand, that doing so might cause ridicule. The dissertation was brought up in a guest editorial by a professor emerita in the humanities in *Svenska Dagbladet*, one of the major morning papers in Sweden. In the professor's editorials, the Swedish school is constantly criticised. In countless articles and a number of books she has assiduously proclaimed the mantra that Swedish education is at a loss. According to her, its downfall is an effect of the education reforms in the sixties, whose aim, among others, was to level out social injustices.<sup>36</sup>

This time the idea was to accuse educational research for being (partly) responsible for the problems in education. My, by then, recently published dissertation was used to illustrate the shortcomings of educational research to improve teaching. The professor starts on a general(ising) note, though. By referring to three studies of educational science, she states that educational research in Sweden is not about how to improve teaching. The reason is that it does not study effects of this or that teaching method. It is not evidence-based. However, effect studies are hardly the only way of improving teaching. In one of the studies she refers to, it turns out that even though the number of effect studies are sparse, a vast number of projects about individuals' learning and didactics have received external funding between 2005 and 2010.<sup>37</sup> One would assume that in quite a few of them one of the aims is to improve teaching. The professor continues by

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<sup>36</sup> See for instance Enkvist, 2016a, 2016b.

<sup>37</sup> Broady, Börjesson, Dalberg and Krih, 2011.

asserting that educational science is expensive – there are presently 175 professors and numerous Ph.D. students, but despite all the money that is spent, educational science, she claims, does not live up to the expectations of the public. Thus, state funding of educational science is an abuse of the taxpayers' money. To prove her point, she then turns to my dissertation:

What is important about this dissertation is that it is typical. It does not study effects. It does not show how students can become better writers or how teachers can become more efficient in teaching writing. It is not about what the public think is at the core of pedagogy, which means the subject pedagogy is in danger.<sup>38</sup>

The professor also asserts that the dissertation does not give evidence that the critics are wrong (to an extent, it actually does) and, additionally, that it does not investigate whether student writing has improved or deteriorated. Therefore, it is useless and expensive, and since the researchers, well, me in this case, are not experts in improving teaching – I did not study effects of a specific method – they should not be appointed as teacher educators. They are a waste of the teacher candidates' time, as is the discipline pedagogy as such. Why should society pay for this activity? she rhetorically asks.

Reading the article was somewhat confusing; in previous research, I have done some practice-oriented research, i.e. tried to improve teaching, just like the professor proposes and I would have thought my more than decade-long experience of teaching in upper secondary school would count for something. At the time, I was therefore rather perplexed, both by the discussions in “The University Leak” and by the editorial. I had expected to become criticised for what I came up with in my analyses. This did not happen, though. I cannot help thinking that one of the reasons is that instead of actually scrutinising my results some of the commentators took the easy way out and saw an opportunity to criticise the scientific discipline, the design of the study and the theories (for instance critical discourse analysis) used. Thus, they might have had a set opinion *beforehand*. Whether they read the

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<sup>38</sup> Enkvist, 2017 (my translation).

text or not did not really matter. The problem is that many of the statements are sweeping and oversimplifying. At hindsight, though, I realise I should have seen it coming.

To paraphrase the professor, her article is interesting because it is typical. In my material, there are a great number of articles, from the seventies onwards, that scorn educational sciences. This is a good example of Ball's concept *discourse of derision*.<sup>39</sup> Analogous with the writing crisis genre I identified, there is probably a "bashing of educational sciences and teacher education" genre with specific traits. But on what grounds is the discipline ridiculed? The professor implies that the research me and others devote our time to is not beneficial to society. I suppose that could be questioned. However, I would suspect there was an even more pressing issue at hand. The professor's critique over the years of school failure had been part of my empirical material. Perhaps this could explain why she used a dissertation in the discipline educational science as proof of the flaws of the discipline pedagogy?<sup>40</sup> True, educational science is a construction created to cure the supposed ills of the discipline pedagogy. One of the aims was to bridge the gap between educationalists and the classroom, supposedly by endorsing clinical evidence-based research. But, as Biesta points out, educational research can have different practical roles. My research would be an example of the *cultural role* of research, in that it provides "a different way of understanding and imagining social reality".<sup>41</sup> When this alternative perspective problematises presuppositions and taken-for-granted ideas, emotions will be aroused.

Let us turn back to the question of research value. I question whether it is within the limits of reason that a professor in one

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<sup>39</sup> Ball, 2006, p. 28.

<sup>40</sup> To an international reader, the concepts might be somewhat puzzling. In Sweden, educational sciences and the discipline pedagogy are sometimes separated. In Lund, for instance, pedagogy belongs to the Faculty of Social Sciences while educational science belongs to The Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology.

<sup>41</sup> Biesta, 2007, p. 19.

field evaluates the social benefits of another (in a morning paper).<sup>42</sup> Even more questionable is the idea that public opinion, or, rather, what said professor guesses is the public opinion, should judge research value. Furthermore, are effect studies really the one and only way forward? In the last part of this essay, I will discuss the evidence-based methods in educational research that the professor and other critics demand.

## **The Elusive Effects of Effect Studies and Evidence-based Education**

The bashing of educational sciences has a long history. In my material, dating back to the seventies, articles where educational science gets the blame for school failure can be found throughout the time period. The history probably goes further back in time. In the seventies, educational research took a turn towards curriculum studies and sociology of education and, thus, in the view of some critics (not least government officials in Britain and the U.S.), distanced itself from what goes on in the classrooms.<sup>43</sup> Researchers became more interested in things such as ideologies behind policy documents and prerequisites and injustices of schooling.<sup>44</sup> Theories of feminism and antiracism came into the fore in the eighties, and to some extent, displaced class analysis.<sup>45</sup> In Sweden, phenomenography, developed by Ference Marton in the seventies, became a popular methodology.<sup>46</sup> A counter-movement,

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<sup>42</sup> As a guest editor the professor presents herself like this: “I want to show the readers that many of the propositions that circulate about school are ideological statements and not facts. The area is extremely ideologised and I want to contribute to tearing down the pedagogical ‘Berlin wall’. There are endless things that need to be said about educational issues”. So true. It appears, though, as if the professor believes she, in contrast with the educationalists, is able to be fully neutral. As Fairclough (1992, p. 90) puts it, “[i]t should not be assumed that people are aware of the ideological dimensions of their own practice”.

<sup>43</sup> Broadfoot and Nisbet, p. 115.

<sup>44</sup> Englund, 2006, p. 385f.

<sup>45</sup> Ball, 1995, p. 258.

<sup>46</sup> Englund, 2006, p. 387.

demanding less interpretative methods, was bound to come. At this time, some educationalists identified themselves as “school effectiveness researchers”.<sup>47</sup>

The evidence movement is, thus, not a new phenomenon. Rømer, however, claims that it was not until the beginning of the new millennium that the concept *evidence* came to be used extensively in discussions about education. Before that it was used here and there as a helping word, but, says Rømer, it has “no tradition, no anchoring, and no sound philosophy”.<sup>48</sup> Contrary to the notion of evidence in a general sense, when used in education the concept has a more specific meaning, most often denoting evidence of *what works*.<sup>49</sup> The concept is slippery, though. As Biesta points out, who would be against the idea that education is based on, or at least informed by, the best available evidence? But, he continues, if the question of for or against evidence comes to the forefront, the question of what kind of evidence we are talking about and the normative question of what kind of education we want, tend to be forgotten.<sup>50</sup> The object of education is not just to learn, but to learn something, he concludes.

As stated above, it may be hard to discern exactly when the evidence movement came into being. However, the notion of evidence-based practices took hold in a context of new school reforms in the late eighties and the nineties making schools, colleges and universities more accountable to local stakeholders.<sup>51</sup> In Britain, some reports in the late nineties questioned the quality and relevance of educational research; it was said to be “fragmented, noncumulative, and methodologically flawed”.<sup>52</sup> In the United States, the same concerns were voiced and in the late nineties legislation and federal research funding were formed by ideas of educational research as being able to tell us what works

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<sup>47</sup> Ball, 1995, p. 258.

<sup>48</sup> Rømer, 2014, p. 109.

<sup>49</sup> Biesta, 2014, p. 20f.

<sup>50</sup> Biesta, 2014, p. 19.

<sup>51</sup> Hammersley, 2007, p. x.

<sup>52</sup> Biesta, 2007, p. 1f.

in the classroom.<sup>53</sup> The same critique has been raised even from within the field, however. In a lecture in 1996, David Hargreaves accused educational research for not being worth the money spent. His remedy was for educational science to learn more from medicine to become relevant to practice. The ills of educational research is, according to Hargreaves, that it is not cumulative – it does not build on earlier research. It is not evidence-based. This argument leads into the confident statement that the research is not useful to teachers.<sup>54</sup> As Hammersley affirms in a reply, this is a “narrowly instrumental view of practical relevance”, one which could be referred to as *the engineering model* of “the relationship between research and practice”.<sup>55</sup> In his lecture, Hargreaves also asked for a national strategy for educational research to “shape the agenda of educational research and its policy implications and applications”.<sup>56</sup> His prayers were heard. In many countries, for instance United States, Britain, Denmark and Sweden, “What Works Clearinghouses” or the like have been instigated, whose purpose is to increase the efficiency of education using evidence-based methods. The clearinghouses were originally based on ideas from the medical field but the ideas were eventually introduced in educational research and practice.<sup>57</sup> Evidently, the evidence movement has gained some ground. It has taken the role as a key player in policy making and research funding in many countries. Some educational researchers have applauded the idea that education should be based on evidence, even though some have felt a need to reduce the instrumentality and therefore talk about evidence-*informed* education.<sup>58</sup> The evidence-informed practices do not necessarily relate to specific methods, but rather a general

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<sup>53</sup> Biesta, 2007, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> Hargreaves, 2007. Slavin, 2002, has argued along the same lines.

<sup>55</sup> Hammersley, 2007, p. 25.

<sup>56</sup> Hargreaves, 2007, p. 10.

<sup>57</sup> Bjerg Petersen, Reimer and Qvortrup, 2014, p. 7.

<sup>58</sup> Bjerg Petersen et al., 2014, p. 9.

set of pedagogical guidelines.<sup>59</sup> To some extent, this more nuanced view is the effect of the criticism against the concept.<sup>60</sup>

The critique from the educational community of evidence-based practices has at times been harsh.<sup>61</sup> Some have criticised the fact that quantitative studies are favoured and more qualitative efforts are given low priority.<sup>62</sup> This is certainly true, but a more pressing issue than which methods are privileged is that educational content and aims are not given much attention.<sup>63</sup> Others have questioned the similarity between medicine and education on the grounds that evidence in these fields have different meanings.<sup>64</sup> Opponents have also cautioned against epistemological insularity made possible by “the omission of other theories including queer, feminist, race, postcolonial, critical, and poststructural theories”.<sup>65</sup> Concerns have been raised about a future of education being technical and instrumental where the primary purpose is to make students ready for a “globalised competition society”.<sup>66</sup> The managerial agenda of evidence-based education has been criticised, and, finally, the fact that values in educational research and practice become absent.<sup>67</sup>

One of the fiercest critics is Thomas Aastrup Rømer.<sup>68</sup> To him the concepts evidence and education are contradictory, which implies that the more evidence-based a practice, the less education, as we know it, can take place. As practice is “reduced to the simple application of evidence-based rules, or as structural passages for enhancing test scores”, the teacher’s judgement is out of the

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<sup>59</sup> According to Rømer, 2014, p. 108, Hattie and Helmke could be said to share this view, as does, I would claim, von Oettingen, 2016.

<sup>60</sup> Biesta, 2007, p. 5.

<sup>61</sup> Biesta, 2007, and Bjerg Petersen et al., 2014, describe the debates and those taking part in them.

<sup>62</sup> Bjerg Petersen et al., 2014, p. 10.

<sup>63</sup> Rømer, 2014, p. 107.

<sup>64</sup> See for instance Hammersley, 2007.

<sup>65</sup> Pierre, 2002.

<sup>66</sup> Bjerg Petersen et al., 2014, p. 9.

<sup>67</sup> Biesta, 2007, p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> Rømer, 2014.

picture. The cultural purposes of education lose significance. In evidence-based research the method has to be detached from the content, the context and the purpose of education if the method is to be isolated and its effect measured. Thus, educational research becomes “a neutral, second-order theory, quite different from science proper”. If the classical scientific question “What is going on?” is replaced by the instrumental question “What works?”, educational sciences are marginalised, Rømer claims.<sup>69</sup> The method acts in relation to national and global rankings, which means evidence becomes part of an international hegemony providing information to a global marketplace. Education, then, “is not about giving schools a knowledge base, and it is not about preparation for life, or for businesses and crafts, for that matter. It is about serving the global economy”.<sup>70</sup>

## Concluding Remarks

Notwithstanding the criticism, this is where we are now. This is what we have to live by. The calls for evidence-based research, I would suppose, will be even stronger in the future. My take on the plead for evidence-based research is that it tends to get too overwhelming, too overshadowing, too all-encompassing. Its inherent ostensible logic that all education and educational research should be based on evidence might at first glance make sense, but the consequence could be that all other kinds of educational research may appear unfounded, speculative and, if you will, unscientific. One of the effects is that in the media scientists in other fields, for instance brain researchers, philosophers, historians, physicists and economists, without being overly well-read in educational sciences, make claims to defining what kind of educational research is of any use.<sup>71</sup> The scientists are welcome to debate the future of schooling, but it would be becoming if they realised that their knowledge about education is perhaps a wee bit limited. Instead, educational science is looked

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<sup>69</sup> Rømer, 2014, p. 113, 111.

<sup>70</sup> Rømer, 2014, p. 114.

<sup>71</sup> See for instance Danielsson, Moberg, Sturmark, and Wikforss, 2016.



upon with contempt, and there is a plead for objective and evidence-based practices. However, apart from the *technical role* of research – “a producer of means, strategies, and techniques to achieve given ends” – educational research could also, as stated before, have a *cultural role*. The two roles could inform each other, but, as Biesta points out, a “key problem with the idea of evidence-based practice is that it simply overlooks the cultural option” and reduces research to what is effective, i.e. to what works.<sup>72</sup> If dominant discourses are allowed to define what education and educational sciences are and set the educational agenda, it would come as no surprise if activities of scholars in education are ridiculed and scoffed at, should they not meet the narrowly demarcated ideals of the apostles of the evidence movement, especially if the educational research problematises taken-for-granted ideas and presuppositions about the doings of schools and students. The research becomes an easy target for those claiming to be in the know about the state of education – without knowing.

The problem is that the discourses of derision are hard to combat, not least since they are spread with the help of the media, and, thus, at least to an extent, shape public opinion. The more the discourses are vented, the greater the risk that “truths” are created and educational researchers derided. A possible effect is that this might make scholars anxious and even silenced. After all, who would want to be a mock-scientist? Then again, who is to counter the negative discourses if not educational researchers. I think we need to stand up against the adversaries.<sup>73</sup> We should not refrain from “going public and being political”. Additionally, we should continue doing research that we believe in, research that asks *what is going on* rather than *what works*, research that “transcends the immediate agenda of [educational research] aimed at improving practice” and instead advocate for “educational change in a broad sense”, as self-study researchers Berry and Forgasz proclaim (a research methodology that would probably be frowned upon by the advocates of the evidence movement).<sup>74</sup> When, in twenty or

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<sup>72</sup> Biesta, 2007, p. 18f.

<sup>73</sup> A good example is Westberg and Prytz, 2018.

<sup>74</sup> Berry and Forgasz, 2018, p. 48.

thirty years, we, in awe, look back upon a time desperately enmeshed with international rankings, measurement, and accountability, I would like to be able to look myself in the mirror and feel that at least I tried.

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# Rebundling higher educational research, teaching and service

*Erik Blair*

**H**igher educational research has been bashed for its aloofness and isolation as individuals question its impact and its worth. This essay aims to highlight how the unbundling of academia, where research has become separate from teaching and service, has left a reduced conception of educational identity in the higher education sector. In becoming isolated, research has become an easier target. Instead, it is proposed that rebundling the three core aspects of higher education - research, teaching and service – would allow for a more holistic conception of academic identity where the various components work together to offer a more robust, and less ‘bashable’, academic identity.

## Introduction

The relationship between higher education and society at large is such that a perceived aloofness<sup>1</sup> and isolation<sup>2</sup> has the potential to leave higher education in a precarious position. Higher education institutions might view themselves as central to civil society and feel that their outputs “contribute to the cultural and political life

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<sup>1</sup> Trow, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Delbanco, 2012.

of modern society”<sup>3</sup> but the relationship between higher education and society is becoming increasingly contested.<sup>4</sup> The different perspectives of those within and without higher education create friction and current trends in higher education further exacerbate this. In such a situation the outcomes of academic work become open to debate and higher education research can find itself in a rather bashable position.

Traditionally, higher education involved lecturers who undertook teaching, research and service.<sup>5</sup> Teaching focussed on initiating students into the mastery of knowledge and understanding; research examined new ideas, new techniques and new possibilities, and service involved administration, customer service, mentorship, civic duty, consultancy and business links.<sup>6</sup> One of the ways that higher education and higher education research has become a more vulnerable target is the current trend towards the ‘unbundling’ of these three academic roles. Where academic identity was once blended, new roles have appeared that leave the higher education workforce fragmented - such that higher education is not only reliant on lecturers but also on those employed in positions such as research fellow, teaching fellow, graduate teaching assistant, tutorial supervisor and instructor. The existing academic tension between research and teaching, and the lowly status of administrative, managerial and organisational tasks have been further exacerbated as constructions of academic roles start to simultaneously fragment and, in places, overlap.

Higher education aims to support student learning through offering an environment that is rich in research, teaching and service. But under each of these headings lie a multitude of tasks<sup>7</sup> that drag academic staff in various directions. Such a breadth of activity means that it has always been hard for one academic to

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<sup>3</sup> Altbach, 2015a.

<sup>4</sup> Altbach, 2015b.

<sup>5</sup> Knight, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Macfarlane, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Coaldrake, 2000; McInnis, 2010.



truly understand their role<sup>8</sup> – let alone for there to be a common conception of academic identity.<sup>9</sup> Trying to get a handle on what might be ‘academic identity’ has, over time, become more difficult and, in recent years, conceptions of academic identities have become more complex<sup>10</sup>, more ambiguous<sup>11</sup> and “progressively fragmented”.<sup>12</sup> The danger in such an environment is that academics are drawn to one particular aspect of practice and this might be to the detriment of student learning. We are already familiar with shorthand labels such as ‘research-intensive’ and ‘teaching intensive’ higher education institutions but there needs to be further problematisation of what this means in relation to learning within such environments.

There is now a greater differentiation of academic roles<sup>13</sup> and new roles have arisen in response to the challenges of contemporary higher education. Brew, Lucas, Boud and Crawford<sup>14</sup> argue that these ‘new’ academics are not highly productive in terms of research but that they are essential to keeping the university going. In this context, colleagues whose focus is on research might be seen by others as elitist; whilst colleagues with a focus on teaching and service might be thought to be more socially conscious, more student-centred, and, perhaps less demanding. These assumptions are not necessarily true but these new ‘stranded’ identities can become more open to characterisation and, with this, become more vulnerable to government reforms, media attacks and institutional changes. The literature suggests that such trends are most evident in North America, the United Kingdom, Australia, and parts of Europe<sup>15</sup> but there is also some evidence of

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<sup>8</sup> Whitchurch, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Archer, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Clegg, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Henkel, 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Elkington and Lawrence, 2012, p.51.

<sup>13</sup> Locke, 2014; Locke, Whitchurch, Smith and Mazonod, 2016; Knight, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Brew, Boud, Lucas and Crawford, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Price and Cotten, 2006; Macfarlane, 2012; Clegg, 2008; Leisyte and Hosch-Dayican, 2014; Coates and Goedegebuure, 2014.

unbundling in other contexts.<sup>16</sup> Here it is proposed that a reimagining of research, teaching and service could lead to a rebundling of academic identity where all requirements of higher education can be better met. This rebundled academic identity would then lead to a more resilient sense of academic self; a more holistic concept of higher education, and a less bashable higher education research psyche.

Kinse<sup>17</sup> discusses how the various aspects that make up the ‘traditional’ academic role have been ‘unbundled’ in the modern university, so that tasks that once belonged together and were the responsibility of one academic have now been split up and passed out to people who have more expertise in a particular domain. Among the drivers of this fragmentation are the rapidly-changing workforce demographics; the repurposing of certain higher education institutions, and a movement to more hybrid forms of teaching, learning and research.<sup>18</sup> Unbundling need not have a negative impact on students but “historically it has been implemented without being carefully designed and considered in conjunction with the learning process”.<sup>19</sup> Such unproblematised implementation can mean that unbundling can lack a robust rationale or justification and each member of the fragmented workforce can find it hard to defend their role in the organisation. Here we see two reasons why the unbundled higher education institution might find itself less able to offer a defence as the division of roles leaves a fragmented workforce and the justification for certain roles might be weak.

For some, navigating the trinity of research, teaching and service was always a matter of tension<sup>20</sup> as they tried to traverse three positions that they did not feel equally comfortable in and the segregation of role has allowed them to focus on areas of

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<sup>16</sup> Macfarlane, 2005; Nyhagen and Baschung, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Kinser, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Coates and Goedegbuure, 2012.

<sup>19</sup> American Council on Education, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Brew, 2001; Ylijoki, 2013.

particular strength. For others, this division has been seen as a weakening of their academic autonomy<sup>21</sup> and with weakened autonomy there is greater potential for critique to do real harm. There is an argument that specialization can be a strength as it allows an individual to be a central expert in their domain; however, specialization is dependent on context. In the biological sense, specialist species thrive in a narrow range of conditions and tend to be more effective in their environment than generalists. But, when environmental conditions change, specialists can find it harder to adapt and generalists thrive.<sup>22</sup> The higher education environment is in constant flux<sup>23</sup> which means that the justification for an organisation needing an individual who teaches specific study skills might become stronger or weaker over time and a higher education researcher who is unbashable one year becomes very bashable the next.

Higher education research has often been questioned in regards to its utility but one of the defences against such critique has been that learning in a research-rich environment is to the benefit of the student body. This defence is in danger of being breached if the learning experience of students becomes segregated from the research experience of academics. The role of the academic itself has now started to be constructed in different ways with university job postings now specifically calling for applications to jobs with titles such as ‘Lecturer (teaching)’; ‘Lecturer (research)’, and ‘Lecturer (scholarship)’. These stranded lecturing roles are often the product of political and ideological governmental drives<sup>24</sup>; funding body requirements<sup>25</sup>; demands on efficiency and performance<sup>26</sup> and institutional income generation.<sup>27</sup> In such a splintered environment, where academic identity is interpreted at the individual level and higher education institutions segregate

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<sup>21</sup> Locke, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Ali and Agrawal, 2012; Dennis, Dapparto, Fattorinin and Cook, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Carr, 2009; Silver, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> McInnis, 2010; Coates and Goedegbuure, 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Coaldrake and Stedman, 1999; McArthur, 2011; Sutton, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Liudvika and Hosch-Dayican, 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Brew, Boud, Lucas and Crawford, 2016.

their workforce, research, teaching and service each become possible targets to be bashed and the learning experience is likely to be impoverished.

## Research, teaching and service

For many academics, the desire to progress within academia continues to be underscored by an emphasis on scholarly publication. This desire, however, is set against the backdrop of university requirements to teach and provide additional services to students<sup>28</sup>, the institution and the wider community.<sup>29</sup> Despite attempts to outline clear demarcations at the institutional level, there continues to be role overlaps warranting a redefinition or reimagining of academic territory. What is evidenced here is Kogan, Moses and El-Khawas'<sup>30</sup> description of the shifting balances and rigidities among research, teaching and service responsibilities. Throughout all this the 'reality' of what it is to work in higher education is reduced to an either/or debate between research and teaching – thus the quality of the learning experience is subservient to the choices that lecturers make.

There is much literature on how to teach in higher education but very little on the realities of teaching or how those in higher education institutions actually conceptualise themselves as teachers.<sup>31</sup> Teaching in higher education has traditionally been seen as a low status activity<sup>32</sup> and Young<sup>33</sup> reports that “teaching is an activity which has a number of more successful rivals in the university reward system”. While there are signs that teaching is improving its standing in higher education, the rewards for excellence are mainly limited to awards for teaching rather than

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<sup>28</sup> Ylijoki, 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Jawitz, 2009.

<sup>30</sup> Kogan, Moses and El-Khawas, 1994.

<sup>31</sup> Fitzmaurice, 2010; Åkerlind, 2004.

<sup>32</sup> Brew, 2001; McInnis, 2000.

<sup>33</sup> Young, 2006, p.194.

institutional advancement.<sup>34</sup> Whilst teaching is “accorded a decent second place” to research<sup>35</sup> the concept of teaching is itself contested. There are differences between various higher education teaching roles and instances exist where these become blurred or underscored by academic identity schisms.<sup>36</sup> Further schisms are formed in relation to the teaching-research link where those who are actively involved in research bring their project outcomes into the teaching environment. With an institutional focus on research as a means of advancement<sup>37</sup> one particular academic ‘identity’ may become entrenched and the cross-over from research into the classroom may be less likely. Interestingly the third strand of traditional academia, service, is rather sparsely represented in the literature and where it is addressed it is often perceived as a distraction.<sup>38</sup> No one group seems to have a clear understanding of what ‘service’ might mean and while notions of service seem to be personally negotiated most definitions seem to lack status<sup>39</sup>. Service tends to be conceptualised as an introspective activity for the benefit of the academic institution and often has no relationship with the wider community.<sup>40</sup> If teaching is perceived to be the poor relation of research then service is a distant, and often ignored, cousin.

## Rebundling

Higher education is not one unified body, rather it is made up of academic tribes and territories.<sup>41</sup> However the fragmentation of focus means that there is simultaneously a division of function and

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<sup>34</sup> Chalmers, 2011.

<sup>35</sup> Davidovitch, Soen and Sinuani-Stern, 2011, p.369.

<sup>36</sup> Winter, 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Young, 2006; Chalmers, 2011.

<sup>38</sup> Moore and Ward, 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Macfarlane, 2005.

<sup>40</sup> Ward, 2003; 2005.

<sup>41</sup> Mears and Harrison, 2014.

an overlap of professional identity.<sup>42</sup> Clegg<sup>43</sup> points to the porousness of higher education boundaries and the flexibility of academic identities - in such an environment, tribal territory is disputed and academic identity is contested rather than affixed. With the proliferation of roles and the contestation of identity, academic tribes now find themselves in a “third space” between professional and academic domains”.<sup>44</sup> In this regard the unbundling of academic identity has left individuals conceptualising their role in response to others. Such a reactive approach to academic identity has ontological implications as unbundled identities are in contestation and no individual can be secure in their position. Quigley<sup>45</sup> suggests that academic identity is drawn from how an academic considers themselves and their role (their ontological perspective) and how they come to know the processes of their role (their epistemological perspective). The day-to-day functions of academic practice are then produced through the interplay of an individual’s understanding of what it is to be an academic alongside their understanding of how to enact their academic role. This leads to the development of a fuzzy identity as each individual works to balance their personal biases.

This contestation of identity exists against a backdrop of learning. If higher education institutions were only research organisations then they would have little need for students but, as it stands, teaching and learning are still core components of university life. While universities produce knowledge through research they also instil and produce knowledge through teaching students. Macfarlane<sup>46</sup> argues that this morphing of identity has reduced academic life and has created a chasm between teachers and their students. In this instance, unbundling has led to the creation of some higher education staff who have no connection with students at all.

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<sup>42</sup> Whitchurch, 2007.

<sup>43</sup> Clegg, 2008.

<sup>44</sup> Whitchurch, 2007, p.394: original emphasis; Bhabha, 2004

<sup>45</sup> Quigley, 2011.

<sup>46</sup> Macfarlane, 2011.

Academic identity is shaped by socio-historical shifts such that it “entails various layers, combining old and new elements and balancing between continuity and change”.<sup>47</sup> With increased tribalism; a constant movement of identity in relation to socio-cultural trends, and pre-existing tensions between research and teaching, individuals working within the higher education space finds themselves in a state of flux that may limit their capacity to fulfil key roles. With the separation of roles the ability of those within higher education to call themselves ‘academic’ becomes questionable. If those who teach in higher education wish to be the creators of knowledge and not just the conduits of knowledge, the effective higher education institution needs to find a way of focussing the many individuals with lecturing roles (de jure or de facto) on the three core academic outcomes.

Higher education is increasingly driven by market forces<sup>48</sup> that have divided the workforce; ‘hollowed out’ academic identity<sup>49</sup> and created pressure on individuals.<sup>50</sup> Where lecturers were once expected to perform all aspects of academic practice, there has now been a movement to displace these all-rounders with specific staff who specialise in a particular aspect of the academic role.<sup>51</sup> If the future of higher education is simply left to the market then “academic values of professional autonomy and collective ideals [will become] squeezed out and marginalised”.<sup>52</sup> The classic trinity of research, teaching and service has never really held. The division of roles alongside the hierarchical bias of research over teaching over service further fragments academic identity as higher education institutions chase excellence in both teaching and research (but not yet in service). As many strands chase many targets it is likely that there will be further unbundling until

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<sup>47</sup> Ylijoki, 2013, p.253.

<sup>48</sup> Sutton, 2015.

<sup>49</sup> Massy, Wilger and Colbeck, 1994.

<sup>50</sup> Winter and O’Donohue, 2012; Billot, 2010.

<sup>51</sup> Macfarlane, 2011.

<sup>52</sup> Winter, 2009, p.243.

constituent parts no longer recognise that they are actually part of a whole body.

When a loose thread on a woollen cardigan is tugged the item of clothing will initially stay recognisable. But if the thread is continually tugged, the integrity of the cardigan is reduced until, eventually, all that is left is a pile of wool. The unbundling of academic identity is currently at a place where things can still be repaired. But with further unravelling we may reach a point where putting academic identity back together will be a very difficult task. The unbundled academic identity allows for bashable teaching, bashable service provision and bashable higher education research. The time then seems right for a rebundling of academic identity – where the many parts orchestrate into one holistic entity. The object in need of change is the individual but this can only occur at the institutional level where job roles are defined. Moving from silos and hierarchies to a more connected higher education institution should not be seen as a ‘back-to-basics’ manoeuvre – as the basic trinity was never fully formed nor fully functioning. Instead, the rebundling of academic identity would involve a reconceptualization in three parts. Firstly, the conceptualisation of what counts as research needs to be widened. Secondly, there needs to be an increased respect for teaching in higher education. Thirdly, notions of service need to be revisited and brought into the core of job roles.

The conceptualisation of what counts as research needs to be widened. There is snobbery in higher education research and everyone knows it. Beyond the old paradigm wars of positivism versus post-positivism and beyond the qualitative/quantitative dynamic we find hugely varying research approaches treated to the same tacitly held normative standard. In such a world, randomised controlled trials vie against case studies; SPSS battles with NVivo; subjects are pitted against participants, and outcomes are measured against Impact Factors. The problem seems to be in the norm-referencing of research and the one-upmanship this brings. A reconceptualization of research should start from the position that scholarly activity is broad-based; that no one approach is ‘best’; that academic fields are not in conflict; that an individual’s



understanding of their own academic identity should not be tested against another's, and there should be "acceptance that we judge the level of 'discipline' for its own sake".<sup>53</sup> In realising that theoretical research is not in competition with applied research, each academic can begin to concentrate on doing the work that they feel obliged to do. Perspectives on what is worthy research are not generalizable and a reframing of what 'counts' as research would start by realising that the quasi-competition across fields is mere snobbery and should be seen as a distraction from developing a holistic academic identity. Further, in adopting a more thoughtful rebundling of academic roles, academics can begin to see that their research is not in competition with their teaching or service commitments and that the interdependency of each facet of academic life makes academic identity overall more robust.

A reconceptualization of what counts as research would allow each individual to examine their own work, so that what 'counts' as research is locally defined and individuals can "contest [the] tyranny of a single definition of research".<sup>54</sup> This framing of research as non-competitive would mean a reduction in needless inter-research pettiness and, instead, academics can move to an intra-research modality – where each researcher tries to do their best research in relation to their own abilities, resources, talents and tenacity. The phantom question that divides academia seeks to find out if my research is better than yours, a better question would be for academics to ask, "Is my research better than my previous research?" Through widening the conceptualisation of what counts as research, academics can move away from inter-field competition; they can begin to pull together the various strands of their own identities and, with this, become more resilient to external challenge.

## **An increased respect for teaching in higher education**

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<sup>53</sup> Salmon, 2003, p.26.

<sup>54</sup> Reicher, 2000, p.3.

Teaching in higher education is not necessarily easy and for some its relatively low status can make it an unattractive option.<sup>55</sup> Such thinking can lead to a vicious cycle. Because of this relegation of teaching as a worthy academic activity, the current 'assumed' model across higher education sees the least experienced individuals take on the greatest teaching load.<sup>56</sup> The hierarchy of academia also sees the least experienced academics teach the newest members of the student body and the most experienced teach the postgraduates. This conceptualisation seems topsy-turvy. University students learn within departments with some of the best minds in their field yet they have very little access to them. Students arrive at university eager to learn yet they are denied contact with those whose thinking is at the cutting edge - thus the perceived aloofness of higher education is reinforced and some students leave with a chip on their shoulder. These students then take up roles in newspapers, government agencies and think tanks primed to be the future bashers of higher education.

Teaching is a pathway to learning but if academics also considered the secondary outcome of teaching as the development of their own structured thinking then individuals could see how teaching would allow them to flex their minds for themselves as well as for their students. An increased conceptual understanding of teaching as a core component of academic identity (rather than the traditional, short-sighted perspective) would lead to academics gaining an increased level of satisfaction and an enhanced level of content knowledge.<sup>57</sup> Good teachers can take difficult ideas and make them accessible and the skillset involved in doing so is not unlike the skillset for writing academic papers; therefore, an increased engagement with teaching and the resultant increased respect would also lead to an enhanced framing of academic ideas. This increased engagement would have the knock-on effect that students would be well-taught by research-active professionals, so that, when the students leave they feel satisfied. Fitzmaurice<sup>58</sup> calls

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<sup>55</sup> Brew, 2001.

<sup>56</sup> Heller, 2012.

<sup>57</sup> Åkerlind, 2004; McArthur, 2011; McInnis, 2000.

<sup>58</sup> Fitzmaurice, 2010, p.54.

for academics to move “beyond [the] narrow and mechanistic view of teaching” and see teaching as a multifaceted practice. An increased respect for teaching, where the role of the educator is seen as altruistic yet self-developmental would move away from the either/or conceptions of the components of the academic identity towards a virtuous cycle around the teaching-research nexus.

## **Notions of service need to be revisited**

Service is the third component of academic identity and the one most easily overlooked. This might be because of a lack of understanding as to what ‘service’ actually means<sup>59</sup> and it might be to do with the way that service is institutionally ignored because of its lack of worth in regard to advancement.<sup>60</sup> In order to have a more cohesive, rebundled, academic identity, notions of service need to be revisited. Service seems to cover a multitude of things – service to student well-being; service to the curriculum; service to the institution; service to the community, and service to the academy at large.<sup>61</sup> Throughout all this, service is perceived to be a bolt-on third leg rather than an integrated activity.<sup>62</sup> Instead of service being an add-on to be considered once yearly before performance review meetings, service should be locally defined, individually refined and institutionally rewarded.

Attending meetings and committees is not for everyone but those who do so should be thanked for their service. For others, service is a way for academic expertise to be applied to the wider community. Others may meet their service requirements through engagement with Government bodies. In the same way that research should be considered to be an individual endeavour, service should be seen as something that is constructed individually and individuals should feel that it is valued. Competition within

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<sup>59</sup> Macfarlane, 2005; Karlsson, 2007.

<sup>60</sup> Price and Cotten, 2006.

<sup>61</sup> Jackson, 2004.

<sup>62</sup> Ward, 2005.

higher education has set colleagues against colleague and has led to the prioritisation of research over teaching and the snubbing of service. The rebundling of academic identity involves a movement towards better collegiate understanding. Not only should service be seen as the ‘right thing to do’<sup>63</sup> but service should be seen as a central tenet of academia.

## Conclusion

The traditional linkages of higher education have become challenged<sup>64</sup> and new roles have arisen in response.<sup>65</sup> This stratification is concerning as academic identity was traditionally built around the individual exercise of a large variety of tasks.<sup>66</sup> Like many institutions, higher education is influenced by current trends and expectations but those within higher education are limited in their capacity to change these factors. Instead of waiting for the right set of wider societal conditions a more productive approach would be for higher education institutions to reconsider how they construct job roles so that their institution can become more robust and less likely to fall victim to changes in circumstance. The current model is one of further separation and with this there is the chance that each aspect of academic identity can become an easier target for external critique. Rebundling academic identity means a movement from inter- to intra-: where the dynamic between the institution and the individual is clarified and the individual is then able to self-actualise. If higher education institutions were to rebundle academic roles then individual academics would be able to conceptualise a more constituted academic identity. A more thoughtful respect for the roles of all involved in higher education; a reimagining of research, teaching and service; the removal of the false divides and false hierarchies, and an emphasis on the common good rather than petty competition could lead to a rebundling of the academic identity

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<sup>63</sup> Macfarlane, 2005.

<sup>64</sup> Liudvika and Hosch-Dayican, 2014.

<sup>65</sup> Brew, Boud, Lucas and Crawford, 2016.

<sup>66</sup> Nyhagen, Mathisen and Baschung 2013

where all constituent parts of higher education can be valued. Where research, teaching and service are divided there is the chance that isolation will bring a reduction in identity and each might fall victim to some level of bashing. Instead it is argued that a holistic, rebundled interpretation of academic identity is likely to lead to an enriched higher education environment where academic staff can draw strength from the various intertwined roles that each academic undertakes.

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# The Economic Problem of Masochism in Education

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**I**t is no secret that there is much to learn from masochism.<sup>2</sup> But its lessons have yet to include the thought that educational relations might themselves be structured by a masochistic economy. Given that our claim for the existence of this economy is made from within the academy, care must be taken, unless the educational researchers who comment on it be considered exempt. Educational researchers are not above nor insulated from what they critique. Educational researchers actively participate in masochistic games of love and hate, pleasure and discomfort that define educational relationships. They participate directly as lovers and sufferers of education themselves, or indirectly by providing long, wearing critiques of education that function as so many reasons for disappointment. Everyday educators and educational researchers alike are tied, bound together, with the latter serving to reinforce this economy of pain by furnishing educators with a scholarly framework, an optional supplement, a pile of books, papers and reports within which they can somewhat pleasurably locate their suffering. But this is not all they achieve. In addition to providing lengthy disquisitions explaining what all educators already feel,

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<sup>1</sup> The order of authors' names is alphabetical and does not indicate priority.

<sup>2</sup> Some of the most important studies since Freud include, Deleuze 1999; Bersani 1986 and Laplanche 1976.

and have long felt more acutely – namely, transposing into writing a sense of the ‘shitness’ of things – educational research helps sustain what it bemoans. It gives succour to that love of education, the educator’s love of what they do, that finds pleasure still in the discomfort and displeasure that education must necessarily produce. Educational research dignifies education with moral purpose and helps sustain our love for it by endlessly implying education must be worthy of morally informed critique and attention. We urge the reader to keep these discomfoting ideas in mind, throughout the essay that follows.

## Approaching Freud

In this essay, we treat Freud’s thought on masochism – and his accompanying discussion of the death drive – as symptomatic of his historical moment. We position Freud within, and view his work as being expressive of, an important moment in the history of subjectivity. For that reason, we deliberately sidestep the basic ontological claims one might associate with psychoanalytic readings of the human condition. Here we have the work of Michel Foucault in mind, in particular his claim that [with Freud] sexuality was only ‘constituted as an area of investigation’ because ‘relations of power had established it as a possible object’.<sup>3</sup> Freud could only discuss sexuality, as he did, because relations of power had already constituted it as a historically contingent, noteworthy phenomenon. As Leo Bersani put it: ‘Foucault reminds us how little Freud innovated’.<sup>4</sup> Freud gave scientific form (and new institutional impetus) to a longstanding disciplinary injunction to know yourself and to declare what you are. Nonetheless, and despite our attempt to locate Freud in history, his work was not purely reactive or symptomatic of his time. According to Bersani, it had the potential to revolutionise the historical phenomena of which it was an expression. There is a destructive radicalism – or what Bersani calls a ‘self-destroying

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<sup>3</sup> Foucault, 1998, p. 98.

<sup>4</sup> Bersani, 1986, p. 30.

intelligence<sup>5</sup> – operating in Freud’s work. In other words, his work may still undermine what it anatomises, although in doing so it must also undermine and evacuate its own authority as an objective science. In Bersani’s reading, Freud is not simply an agent of disciplinary power, though this is often his function. Freudianism may well have become ‘the most pervasive, and the most prestigious modern form of a discursive technology of self-knowledge and self-creation’, but Freud’s work also bore the potential to destroy ‘the technology he brilliantly exemplifies by his very attempt to make its assumptions explicit’.<sup>6</sup> It is with this argument in mind that we make the following claim:

When Freud discusses masochism, he extends the psychoanalytic gaze to a set of relations – relations by which we are formed through practices of self-discipline and self-mortification – that have been developing and extending their hold on Western subjectivity since the Christian pastoral. In so doing, he also allows us to ponder how those relations might be undermined, or recast. In this paper we are primarily interested in these relations insofar as they are also *educational* relations.<sup>7</sup> We have discussed

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<sup>5</sup> Bersani, 1986, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Bersani, 1986, p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> A note on our use of the term ‘education’ is perhaps necessary: It is common in educational critique to argue that ‘education’ refers to something greater than ‘schooling’. This argument is made against those who are said to confuse the latter reality with the former idea and who find themselves unable, as a result, to imagine that education might be different, that it might be better than what it is in its institutional manifestation. Departing from this point of view, and its accompanying insistence that we define what we mean by education (against all that would debase it), we do not seek to dignify or overly clarify the term. Rather, we allow deliberate conceptual slippage between the meaning of education in the more specific, institutional sense (involving salaried teachers, institutionalised children, classrooms, assemblies, auditors, administrators, inspectors, and so on), and education in the broadest sense of the word, understood as the set of inherited techniques and cultural practices that structure and produce the social relations and

the Christian pastoral and its connection to education at length elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> Very briefly, and for the purposes of this paper, by ‘Christian pastoral’ we refer to the modes of introspection and self-mortification developed by the church and its medieval pastorate. As Ian Hunter argued, although these modes of introspection and subject formation were developed by the Church, they were not confined to its institutions, and eventually managed to ‘slip their doctrinal moorings’, providing amongst other things the ‘core moral technology of the school’.<sup>9</sup> These pastoral relations and techniques still operate in such a way that ‘binds the educator to his pupils by committing the educator to a project of mutual redemption’.<sup>10</sup> Pastoral power ensures that the educator still inherits something of the connection, and self-understanding, that once tied a pastor to his congregation, where the plight of the educator is ‘fettered to the plight of those to be educated’, ensuring that teachers ‘carry the success of education, and the educational encounter on their conscience’.<sup>11</sup>

Though we have not yet put it in these terms, there is something decidedly masochistic operating here at the core of our commitment to education, where educators, and students, endure considerable discomfort for the ‘love’ of education. This love is driven by an enduring perception of the inherent significance, intrinsic nobility and foundational importance of what they do. Here we must be specific. We are using masochism in the strong, exacting sense, developed by Freud. To adapt Laplanche’s reading of (Freud’s reading of) masochism to our current purposes: we argue that ‘the [educational] subject is masochistic’

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subjectivities that define Western modernity. We argue that this approach better reflects the complexity and systematic evasiveness if not functional duplicity of an idea that has risen to such prominence in the modern era.

<sup>8</sup> Allen, 2017; 2014; Bojesen, 2017; 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Hunter, 1994, p. xxi.

<sup>10</sup> Allen, 2017, p. 64.

<sup>11</sup> Allen, 2017, p. 61.

properly speaking, ‘only insofar as he [or she] derives enjoyment *precisely where* he [or she] suffers, and not insofar as he [or she] suffers in one place in order to derive enjoyment in another’. Or, to put it slightly differently, ‘the subject suffers *in order to* derive enjoyment and not only *in order to be able to* derive enjoyment (or to pay the “tax” for enjoyment)’.<sup>12</sup> This distinction is crucial, as many would agree that education involves the acquisition of some ability or other to defer gratification. From this more easily accepted, socially acceptable, point of view, educational discomfort may be necessary in order to deliver us to the fulfillment that education promises. To exemplify this position (which is not our own), the educator might say: ‘You may not, for instance, enjoy the homework we set, but if you stick with it, it will bear fruit in terms of a better understanding of your subject matter.’ You must, in effect, pay an educational tax, for the fulfillment that education promises to deliver you to. But this is the extent of the role of suffering in education, according to this point of view. Our understanding of masochism is clearly different. We aim to develop and substantiate the far more radical claim that masochism in education involves a more intimate, immediate link between suffering and enjoyment. We propose, then, to extend our previous work by investigating the possible link between our collective, inbuilt commitment to education, and what Freud offers by way of a theory of masochism. In line with the position set out above, and to avoid misunderstanding, it is worth pointing out that our argument is limited to a form of diagnosis that attempts to identify the historically contingent, masochistic workings of education, without thereby claiming that all education is, or that education must always be, essentially masochistic.

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<sup>12</sup> Laplanche, 1976, p. 104.

## The Economic Problem of Masochism

In ‘The Economic Problem of Masochism’, a brief essay by Freud originally published in 1924, we encounter its three principle forms (according to Freud): feminine, erotogenic and moral (or mental)<sup>13</sup> masochism.<sup>14</sup> Once we get beyond the initial shock invited by the suggestion that the experience of Western education is basically masochistic, or at least has strong masochistic tendencies (and we should not underestimate the difficulty of reaching this position, our point of departure); it is perhaps easiest to link *moral* masochism with the kinds of mental torture education is often associated with. We can see the imprint of something like moral masochism in the kinds of self-regulating, disciplinary, confessional practices education has us enact. When faced with the three forms of masochism, we will most likely find ourselves able to make this associative link for moral, rather than feminine or erotogenic masochism (the latter two involve physical and sexual torture), not least because, according to Freud, moral masochism is ‘chiefly remarkable for having loosened its connection with what we recognize as sexuality’.<sup>15</sup> Although this does not mean that the libido is absent from the practices of moral masochism, it is at least sublimated. We are, in other words, able to preserve our understanding of educational practices as non-erotic, and for that reason respectable, whilst entertaining the idea that education could be, in some sense, masochistic.

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<sup>13</sup> Though ‘moral masochism’ is Freud’s chosen term in this essay, as the editor’s footnote points out, Freud had earlier proposed the term ‘mental masochism’ to refer to those ‘who find their pleasure, not in having *physical* pain inflicted on them, but in humiliation and mental torture’ (Freud cited in editor’s footnote: 2001a, p. 165).

<sup>14</sup> Freud, 2001a. These are all ‘secondary’ forms of masochism, not to be confused with ‘primary’ masochism, which, for Freud, is the death drive itself in its unmediated form.

<sup>15</sup> Freud, 2001a, p.165.



Though we will discuss moral masochism at length below, we nonetheless suggest that Freud's brief analysis of erotogenic masochism is most telling, since it foregrounds the relation between the self-annihilating 'death drive'<sup>16</sup> and the operations of the libido. This connects with and extends our understanding of educational violence – or 'benign violence'<sup>17</sup> – in that it helps us to see how the annihilating tendency of education, which is oriented towards failure and diminishment, is combined with the avowedly nurturing, enabling ethos characteristic of all well-meaning educators. We suggest that, through an engagement with Freud, we might achieve greater understanding of how a positive educational ethos exists alongside and manages to survive the persistent shortcomings, and systemic failings of institutionalised education. Indeed, as we argue below, masochism could be essential to the survival of Western education in its current form. To substantiate this claim we must carefully work through Freud's theory of masochism, and explore how it might help us to understand what we view as the neurotic dimension of all educational relationships.

## Framing masochism

Freud begins his discussion of masochism with a conundrum: 'if mental processes are governed by the pleasure principle [an enduring hypothesis in Freud's work]...masochism is incomprehensible'.<sup>18</sup> Unlike its counterpart, sadism, where pleasure is derived from inflicting pain on others, masochism ties pleasure to processes that endanger the organism experiencing it. This strange association between pain and pleasure is

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<sup>16</sup> The death instinct, as many commentators have noted, is not an instinct at all. See Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, pp. 214-217. As such, even though we otherwise cite the translation from the Standard Edition verbatim, we amend 'instinct' to 'drive' and 'instinctual' to 'drive-induced'.

<sup>17</sup> Allen, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Freud, 2001a, p. 159.

subsequently explained by Freud as being due to the interaction of ‘two classes of drives’ – ‘the death drives and the erotic (libidinal) life drives’.<sup>19</sup> Freud goes on to explain what he means by this, though not before a brief diversion, considering an alternative account of pleasure before he embarks on his discussion of masochism. This alternative vision is altogether more disturbing<sup>20</sup>, and Freud retreats from it, declaring quite simply: ‘But such a view cannot be correct’.<sup>21</sup> We draw attention to the existence of this aborted argument in Freud’s essay to make the point that Freud’s subsequent account of how masochism functions is less objectionable in terms of its consequences than it might have been. Indeed, as we explain below, Freud’s account might invite ambivalence in relation to the problem of masochism, even acceptance. It strikes us that, as we extend Freud’s account of masochism to education we might invite similar ambivalence, where to identify education as masochistic is to open a problematic space of reflection, rather than embark upon a rejection of, or at least polemic against education.

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<sup>19</sup> Freud, 2001A, p. 159.

<sup>20</sup> In this rival account Freud speculates that every unpleasure might be understood as coinciding ‘with a heightening, and every pleasure with a lowering, of mental tension due to stimulus’ (159-60). Pleasure is associated with the calming of the mental apparatus, with ‘the purpose of reducing to nothing, or at least of keeping as low as possible, the sums of excitation which flow in upon it’ (159). Such an account of pleasure, as a kind of serene state, nonetheless places pleasure ‘in the service of the death drives, whose aim is to conduct the restlessness of life into the stability of the inorganic state’. Pleasure would hence be redefined as opposed to the ‘demands of the life drives – the libido’, and be as such a kind of death drive seeking the annihilation of the organism that experiences it. This might well explain masochism and its association of pleasure and pain, but Freud abruptly ends this line of argument (according to Bersani (59), this was the hypothesis that Freud had been simultaneously recognising and repressing since *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*). Freud instead opts for an apparently more nuanced, and one might observe, more palatable hypothesis (which occupies him for the remainder of the essay), where pleasure is partly redeemed.

<sup>21</sup> Freud, 2001A, p. 160.

Of the three forms of masochism, Freud identifies erotogenic masochism (involving sexual excitation) as the basis of the other two. He begins by alerting the reader to the fact that his analysis will remain ‘incomprehensible unless one decides to make certain assumptions about matters that are extremely obscure’.<sup>22</sup> The reader must, we are told, accept the abstractions Freud is about to introduce, most notably:

In (multicellular) organisms the libido meets the drive of death, or destruction, which is dominant in them and which seeks to disintegrate the cellular organism and to conduct each separate unicellular organism [composing it] into a state of inorganic stability’.<sup>23</sup>

Faced with such a destructive impulse, the libido ‘has the task of making the destroying drive innocuous’. To an extent it fulfils this task, Freud argues, by diverting the so-called death drive outwards, in acts of aggression directed towards objects in the external world. Mediated by the libido, this drive, which can be called ‘the destructive drive, the drive for mastery, or the will to power’, becomes what Freud calls ‘sadism proper’.<sup>24</sup> Sadism is, then, the death drive directed outwards by the erotic (libidinal) life drives. But this is not the end of the matter. The outward projection of the death drive does not exhaust it. Another portion of the destructive drive ‘remains inside the organism and, with the help of the accompanying sexual excitation described above, becomes libidinally bound there’.<sup>25</sup> This is what Freud calls erotogenic masochism.

As we extend the analysis of masochism to educational relations (both those directed outwards and those directed inwards), it is important to note the complexity, mutual relationality, and

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<sup>22</sup> Freud, 2001a, p. 161.

<sup>23</sup> Freud, 2001a, p.163.

<sup>24</sup> Freud, 2001a, p. 163.

<sup>25</sup> Freud, 2001a, pp. 163-4.

fluidity of these associations between drives (as Freud might put it), or in our terms; the complexity, relationality, and fluidity of these historically acquired habits. Though Freud admits he is without the means to understand how, exactly, the taming of the death drive by the libido is effected, he does point out that there must be ‘a very extensive fusion and amalgamation, in varying proportions, of the two classes of drives’. We never encounter ‘pure life drives or pure death drives’ but ‘only mixtures of them in different amounts’.<sup>26</sup> By analogy, it is this strange mixture of the annihilating and enabling tendencies of education that forces us, as critics, into engaging with education with a certain amount of ambivalence, or at least cause for hesitation. Though education may involve considerable symbolic violence, systematic disadvantage, exclusion and diminishment, and at the other extreme may involve moments of (for contemporary morality) unacceptable erotic interest (on the part of the teacher or student), it largely achieves the ‘diffusion’<sup>27</sup> of these two rival tendencies. This so-called diffusion results in situations that are as insidious as they are hard to detect.

Typically, education treads a middle ground, less erotically charged or outright violent than it has the potential to be.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, these allusions to erotic and destructive impulses,

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<sup>26</sup> Freud, 2001a, p. 164.

<sup>27</sup> Freud, 2001a, p. 164.

<sup>28</sup> This should not be taken to imply that education in its moderate, moderating form is the least of all evils. Its tendency to reconcile or at least bring into peaceful connection rival tendencies is not, necessarily, to be admired. Just as, for Freud, ‘heterosexual genitality’ represents the ‘hierarchical stabilization of sexuality’s component instincts’ (Bersani, 1986, p. 32) – a deeply problematic assumption on Freud’s behalf that normalises and excludes – the principles of measure and the attempted ordering of life by education as it combines and enfolds its libidinal and destructive investments is not necessarily desirable. Education achieves a hierarchical stabilisation of forces that also *enforces* a vision of the world akin in scope and coercive self-righteousness to its heteronormative cousin.

which, we claim, are built into the architecture of Western educational relations, may, even in their diffuse form still strike most readers as too scandalous and over-drawn to warrant serious consideration. And so (as suggested above) we might move swiftly to a discussion of moral masochism, which is 'chiefly remarkable for having loosened its connection with what we recognise as sexuality'.<sup>29</sup> As we do so, however, we must remember that for Freud (at least in this particular essay of his) erotogenic masochism is still the root form, and as such, cannot be absolutely disconnected from its sublimated heir. Similarly, though moral masochism may at first sight appear more palatable, as we explore below, it could have equally disturbing implications.

It is also worth noting in passing that the deliberate association, and intermingling between rival drives and tendencies in Freud's work, extends also to the distinction between sadism and masochism introduced above. These two opposing channels by which the death drive is modulated and expressed cannot be entirely separated, since Freud suggests a degree of fluidity, or potential for movement, between them, where the 'drive for destruction, which has been directed outwards' can 'be once more introjected, turned inwards'.<sup>30</sup> Presumably, introjected impulses might also be redirected outwards. Indeed, this informs our understanding of education, where there is, we claim, a complex relationship between its learned masochistic and sadistic impulses. As we seek to exemplify below in our analysis of film, the educator's learned masochisms justify his or her sadisms, and the sadism of the educator becomes a prompt for ever more introverted masochisms – all of which would be unbearable if it were not for the binding of pleasurable satisfaction into forms of educational discomfort.

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<sup>29</sup> Freud, 2001a, p. 165.

<sup>30</sup> Freud, 2001a, p. 164.

As we approach our discussion of moral masochism, which, for Freud, is just as ‘unmistakably pathological’,<sup>31</sup> we should also point out where we depart from Freud’s analysis, or perhaps more accurately, where we deepen and further extend Freud’s pathological diagnosis. Freud identifies the strength of moral masochism (the tendency for those receiving it to ‘react inversely’ to ‘praise or appreciation’, leading to a further decline in their condition<sup>32</sup>), and its hold upon at least some of us, as ‘one of the most serious resistances and the greatest danger to the success of our medical or educational aims’<sup>33</sup> – we will explain why it is so resistant in what follows. We, by contrast, argue that the reach of this neurosis extends into education itself. The strength of moral masochism today is its near ubiquity. Unlike Freud’s, ours is a decidedly unredemptive reading, which offers no hope of salvation through existing educational means, since these means are infected by the neurosis they might hope to combat.

Freud links his discussion of moral masochism to his earlier work on the conscience, because at first sight it seems as though moral masochism is an example of an ‘especially sensitive conscience’, as it reacts inversely to praise or appreciation.<sup>34</sup> Recapping his earlier work, Freud explains that the conscience is the residual effect of parental authority, which becomes internalised in the super-ego. As a function that inflicts discomfort on the self, the conscience could be easily confused with moral masochism: ‘We may be forgiven for having confused the two to begin with’<sup>35</sup>, presumably since both involve the introjection of a destructive impulse. The key dimension of the conscience, however, is that it entails ‘consciousness of guilt as an expression of a tension between the ego and the super-ego’.<sup>36</sup> Moral masochism is different, in that it is largely undetectable by the person afflicted

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<sup>31</sup> Freud, 2001a, p. 166.

<sup>32</sup> Freud, 2001b, p. 49.

<sup>33</sup> Freud, 2001a, p. 166.

<sup>34</sup> Freud, 2001a, pp. 168-9.

<sup>35</sup> Freud, 2001a, p. 169.

<sup>36</sup> Freud, 2001a, pp. 166-7.

– and this, precisely, is why it is so resistant to therapy. Though our ethical sense, which is produced by the conscience, employs the sadism of the super-ego to inflict its violence on the guilty subject, moral masochism operates directly through the ego. This is why ‘the masochistic trend of the ego remains as a rule concealed from the subject and has to be inferred from his [or her] behaviour’. For Freud, this is by stark contrast to the ‘sadism of the super-ego’ that becomes for the most part ‘glaringly conscious’.<sup>37</sup>

This may seem a little abstract, and overly dependent on an acceptance of Freud’s prior theory of the ego, the super-ego, and their interaction. Nonetheless, we would argue that a distinction appears here, in Freud’s work, that could help explain why some educators might struggle to identify with the claims made towards the beginning of this paper; namely, the suggestion that the educator is bound to his or her pupils, so that the difficulties of the latter bear heavily on the conscience of the former, forcing teachers to carry the success of education, and the educational encounter on their conscience as a component of Freud’s notion of moral masochism. Even fewer educators would identify with the further claim, that this mutual bind, which involves considerable discomfort for all involved, is also enjoyed, where the educator derives satisfaction from being made at least partly responsible for the success of his or her pupils. Educators are both fettered to and libidinally invested in their students. As they tie themselves in knots regarding responsibilities they can never fulfill, hopes they can never satisfy, educators experience a quickening of the pulse, a quota of pleasure. But perhaps educators should not be expected to identify with these claims. We, indeed, as authors, struggle to identify with them. We find our affective commitments to education difficult to escape, as we struggle to understand why we and other educators remain within this masochistic bind which fetters the educator to an educational project that must, as a rule, involve considerable failure as well as success. It is surely odd that educators continue

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<sup>37</sup> Freud, 2001a, p. 169.

to feel bad about outcomes that are inevitable, when failure must be produced by a hierarchizing and stratifying system that needs failure in order to conceptualize success. It is strange that the educator's guilt leads to redoubled effort, and that the educator can derive some kind of satisfaction from that effort. It is odd, not simply that we remain at work but that we retain our fond attachment to the idea that educators are, at core, well intended; that education provides a suitable context for these good intentions to be expressed. These problems seem intractable, though the language by which we frame this conundrum may well be part of the problem. We proceed as though we might render educational commitments intelligible, however perverse they may turn out to be. It could be that the fettering of the educator to education is largely automated (as an acquired habit), and beyond interrogation. It could be that this self-destructive, uncomfortable, but strangely gratifying bind that Freud describes, and that we will go on to explore in the context of education, is barely available to inspection. Perhaps the economy of educational masochism can only be inferred from the behavior of educators, rather than confirmed through some kind of confession or confessional analysis.

If these intuitions are correct – intuitions that associate educational discomfort with Freud's conception of moral masochism – it should also be observed that if the ego of the educator is already tied to its own destruction, it has no need of a super-ego (recall, that for Freud, the ego of the moral masochist is already bent on its own destruction in such a way that this impulse evades detection). Or to frame this slightly differently, the self-destructive operations of the educator may be less dependent on a super-ego, with its links to governmental authority, than is generally assumed. This argument is worth attending to, since most commentators still blame the latter for submitting education to its reductive, 'anti-educational'



demands.<sup>38</sup> We may instead have reached a stage where educators diminish themselves to a great extent automatically and unconsciously. The demands made by an increasingly elaborate regime of audit and inspection – of efforts to embed performative regimes such as performance related pay – would, from this point of view, be mere embellishment to educational subjectivities that are already committed to their own subjugation. The imperium of an overweening governmental authority finds itself knocking on an open door.

This distinction between the educational conscience (as something we can become conscious of) and the largely unconscious, drive-induced masochistic tendency of the educator, also helps to explain how morality (as an explicit set of commitments and ideals) can be largely evacuated from educational discourse and practice, without reducing the commitment of educators to their practice. It explains how much of the educator's work can now involve a commitment to practices and procedures that stretch our definition of education as a values-based endeavor, without breaking education as an institutional, economic activity. It explains how the masochistic educator can diligently operate within a system that they conceive of as destroying or undermining a more 'authentic' education, approached as a morally informed activity, whilst retaining his or her commitments to the performance of being an educator. This educator will 'do what is inexpedient' from the perspective of a morally informed educational practice, without threatening his or her status or self-understanding as an educator. The masochistic educator, or the masochist within the educator has escaped morality in this sense, and become available to cynicism, whilst retaining the sense that the profession is still worthy of regard. As will be upheld in our concluding reading of *Dead*

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<sup>38</sup> This position is so dominant in educational critique that it would be unfair to single out authors and reductive to offer a string of exemplary references. It is the framework that structures understanding, rather than a position that individual researchers choose to occupy.

*Poet's Society*, this educator will dutifully 'act against his [or her] own interests', will 'ruin the prospects which open out to him [or her]', and will perhaps even 'destroy his [or her] own existence',<sup>39</sup> whilst retaining a commitment to education and the dignity of the educator that is to all intents and purposes being undermined by the same individual.

To follow the argument of Freud's essay to its last remarks, we might also add the disturbing claim that the educator is only in this self-destructive position due to the '*cultural suppression of the drives*' which education has achieved. In teaching us to hold back our destructive impulses, to live within the ordered violence of institutional education, it has held back, in Freud's terms, 'a large part of the subject's destructive impulses from being exercised in life'.<sup>40</sup> Due to its careful ordering of violence, education generates a situation where violence turns inwards, where masochism is intensified so that it constitutes the ego of the educator and educated person. To the extent that educated people are still able to reflect on their own inevitable destruction, we would claim that they are oddly consoled by that prospect, as if their martyrdom to education would be the finest expression of their commitment to it. Indeed, given the role of the libido in constituting this perverse connection of pleasure to pain inherent in masochism, we should notice how the '[educated] subject's destruction of him [or her]self cannot take place without libidinal satisfaction'.<sup>41</sup> Education is destroying itself, and we love it.

## **Educational symptoms of the masochistic economy**

Freud's analysis of masochism allows us to better understand how education is underpinned and maintained by the libidinal investment of the educator – a term we use to refer to those who are (and this includes almost all of us) ideologically wedded to the success of education. This commitment to the success of

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<sup>39</sup> Freud, 2001a, pp. 169-170.

<sup>40</sup> Freud, 2001a, p. 170.

<sup>41</sup> Freud, 2001a, p. 170.

education is connected in modernity to the idea that education will, at its best, aim to secure success, progress, and betterment for all at the level of morality, rather than simply improve education along instrumental lines, according to a reduced, reductive, and technical understanding of the world. Another way of describing this predicament is to say that the educator has a libidinal attachment to the idea that education is inherently redemptive, not simply on an individual basis, but socially, politically, even economically. That is to say, it does not merely provide contextually specific and pragmatic accommodations to the world as it is, but a deeper, ‘moral’ value. The commitment to the inherent beneficence of education informs, enframes and justifies the educator’s love of the student, the educator’s love of education, and ultimately, the educator’s love of him or herself as an educated person. What is peculiar about this commitment is that it not only helps obscure the underpinning violence of educational relations (by adding a layer of good feeling to them), it also *establishes the necessary conditions for that violence*. Here again Freud is instructive, since masochism involves an intimate, and enduring relation between the libido and the death-drive. This might explain how the educator’s love of education exists alongside the accompanying drive – also intrinsic to all educational experience – to discipline, diminish, fail when necessary, and even destroy those involved in the educational relationship. Freud’s conception of erotogenic masochism also draws attention – again crucially for us – to the opposite of erotogenic masochism, namely, sadism, which is built into the Western educational tradition and its drive to mastery.<sup>42</sup>

The figure of the educator, who has attained some form of educational success, is marked by an implicit self-assurance of the benefits of education. This assurance manifests itself in the certainty with which many educators, and those who consider themselves educated, celebrate and perpetuate education as the primary means to social and self-betterment. The learned

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<sup>42</sup> Allen, 2016.

masochism which underpins their own experience of education comes to guide the structure and process of their own pedagogic practices. A stark example of where this masochistic process reaches its limit is in the experience of teaching students who, for whatever reason, do not submit themselves to learn in a particular context. These students refuse or simply do not experience the inbuilt, automated guilt associated with ‘not learning’ that educators wield as their primary weapon. The educator, by contrast, has had this guilt, concomitant with moral masochism, grafted on to their psychic and social sense of being and will not hesitate in projecting its destructive impulse outwards. They have subjected themselves to education so thoroughly that the slippage between their internal sense of guilt and the projection of that guilt onto the external educational subject become an extension of the same movement. What intransigent pupils nonetheless produce is a situation where the educator cannot ‘appeal’ to the will to learn of the student. The educator and the student do not appear to share a common masochistic economy, and so there is no connection between them along these lines, at least, not in that instance. This forces the apparently well-meaning educator to switch techniques, opting for more overt disciplinary interventions. The educator must adopt the harsh, judgemental tones of the super-ego.

For Freud, this educator is forced to resort to ‘ethical’ means, to the enactments of a moralising self. In his terms, the ‘ethical sense’ is created by drive-induced renunciation, which then ‘expresses itself in conscience and demands a further renunciation of drive’.<sup>43</sup> As an individual who has been successfully introduced into, and has come to manifest the key subjective frameworks of the prevailing moral order, the educator has had their own drives co-opted, and now they seek to do the same to their students. To the extent that education still operates through the conscience, educators enforce that conscience either through direct appeal to educational systems of value (‘do this because it is important for

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<sup>43</sup> Freud, 2001a, p. 170.

x reason'), or through indirect appeal to those systems of value ('do this because I tell you to [for reasons that must remain obscure to you, but which nonetheless inform my practice, and will become apparent after you submit to them]'). As we have argued, this operates alongside a region of guilt established by educational masochism, which we might describe as 'guilt without conscience', a form of automated guilt, unavailable to reflection.<sup>44</sup> It has no need of a super-ego (internally manifested, or externally reinforced) for its enforcement. For this reason, no conflict appears between a super-ego and a recalcitrant ego that would make the enforcement of that guilt apparent.

To recap, Freud claims that masochism – and we would say education – comes from 'the death drive and corresponds to the part of that drive which has escaped being turned outwards as a drive of destruction.'<sup>45</sup> We would claim that, through the educational relation, this drive can be redirected outwards, and conditions the educator's near-instinctual repulsion when faced with situations of 'not learning'. The educated masochist becomes a sadistic educator through the outward projection of the educator's 'guilt without conscience'. And here it is worth pausing to reflect on that external projection when Freud writes that, since this manifestation of the death drive 'has the significance of an erotic component even the subject's destruction of himself cannot take place without libidinal satisfaction.'<sup>46</sup> Freud is only suggesting that this erotic component is manifested through self-destruction, but if, as we claim, the educational

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<sup>44</sup> It remains unclear to us whether this guilt might be a residual effect of a departed conscience (where the framework of value that animated that conscience has fallen away) and hence would be a 'guilt without conscience' in the literal sense; or whether this guilt might be a misdiagnosis of the experience of educational masochism (i.e. it only feels like guilt, because that is how we are consciously accustomed to understanding and interpreting the experience of educational bad feeling).

<sup>45</sup> Freud, 2001a, p. 170.

<sup>46</sup> Freud, 2001a, p. 170.

relation is an outward projection of internal guilt experienced in ‘not learning’, libidinal satisfaction can, in fact, be produced through the destructive co-option of the students’ drives by the educator in the name of education.

To support this interpretation, we can turn to Jacques Lacan’s own reading of part of Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents* (which expands on many of the themes we have introduced above, including the pastoral), from his seventh seminar on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, which itself purports its primary aim as ‘deepening our understanding of the economic problem of masochism’.<sup>47</sup> In Lacan’s interpretation of Freud, the paradox of ‘moral conscience’

shows itself to be more demanding the more refined it becomes, crueller and crueller even as we offend it less and less, more and more fastidious as we force it, by abstaining from acts, to go and seek us out at the most intimate levels of our impulses or desires. In short, the insatiable character of this moral conscience, its paradoxical cruelty, transforms it within the individual into a parasite that is fed by the satisfactions accorded to it. Ethics punishes the individual relatively much less for his faults than for his misfortunes.<sup>48</sup>

This paradoxical formula, which reflects the connection that Freud draws between libidinal satisfaction and moral masochism at the end of ‘The Economic Problem of Masochism’, takes on an even darker hue when applied to the context of education. Of course, most contemporary Western educators rightly see themselves as far removed from something like the harsh disciplinarian of the Victorian schoolroom, but what Lacan and, for him, Freud, open a way towards thinking, is the cruelty of a refined moral conscience. For Lacan, as for Freud, this moral

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<sup>47</sup> Lacan, 2008, p. 18.

<sup>48</sup> Lacan, 2008, p. 110.

conscience is only explored as far as its manifestation inward, however, the most commonplace classroom settings make clear that this refined cruelty has an outward facing dimension as well. We might also dwell further on the sentence, 'Ethics punishes the individual relatively much less for his faults than for his misfortunes', by reflecting on the practices of educators in contexts where student cohorts are primarily made up of socially marginal and/or underprivileged groups. Education is presented as the cure to social ills in the absence of sufficient material support – alongside which, any professed lack of desire to engage with this 'educational solution' is so alien to educational thought, so unavailable to inspection, understanding and sympathy, that it can only be described as deviant. The cruel paradox of this 'guilt without conscience' is projected outward by educators in our schoolrooms, with the expectation that it be internalized in the psyche of their students. It is insatiable, completely without sympathy, and the source of an ideology that declares 'all can achieve success', though few will, or can.

### **Representing the Masochistic Economy in Education: Dead Poets Society**

A prominent representation of educational experiences, which has arguably risen to the heights of cultural phenomenon, is the 1989 film *Dead Poets Society*. We do not suggest that it is directly representative of educational experience in schooling, but rather that it is representative of a cultural desire for what schooling *should* be like, thereby being productive of the masochistic economy it also represents. Our reading will suggest that the film exhibits the most destructive – which is also to say, most 'enjoyable' – components of the masochistic economy in education, both on the screen and in the experiences of its audiences. The film shows how pleasure and guilt conjoin in education, as well as enhancing both the pleasure and guilt the audience might feel in relation to education. This represented guilt operates on two levels, first in terms of the explicit structure of the institution the boys attend, Welton Academy, and its

prioritisation of a responsibility towards academic success and professional careers. We would suggest that this operation of guilt is not only too consciously, overtly enforced via the rhetoric of the teachers and in the minds of the boys, but is also not pleasurable enough to successfully engender anything approaching erotogenic or moral masochism in the Freudian sense. By contrast the second operation of guilt, exhibited primarily through the lessons of Mr Keating (played by Robin Williams) and their effects, combines nuanced forms of both moral masochism and erotogenic masochism (and thus constitutes what we have called ‘guilt without conscience’).<sup>49</sup>

We position our own reading directly in opposition and in ironic relation to an article by Éamonn Dunne, which tells us that the film is ‘a powerfully emotive treatise on radical pedagogical practice, an allegorical representation of the power of perversity to make us fall in love with the aberrant, the rebellious, the transgressive’.<sup>50</sup> We argue instead that Mr Keating does not escape the conservative, conformist intentions and morally disciplinary traditions of education. Nor does he escape the masochistic economy which underpins and exceeds them; he exemplifies and intensifies those economies. The forms of pedagogy Keating engages in are, then, not to be seen in opposition to other more obviously traditional forms but rather as their necessary complement. Keating himself is the successful

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<sup>49</sup> Clarke (2018) also draws attention to the stifling effects of Keating’s injunction to enjoy. In this analysis, Clarke contrasts the traditional authority of the school to Keating’s equally constraining transgressive approach via a distinction between the prohibitive ‘Oedipal’ father, and the obscene ‘anal’ father, or ‘Master of Enjoyment’ (see Žižek 2005, p. 206). Though the violence of the latter is harder to identify, it is probably still easier to identify than masochism, since it is located in the educational superego, rather than residing more fundamentally in the ego.

<sup>50</sup> Dunne, 2013, p. 633.



product of the system (and we would say, masochistic economy) that critics such as Dunne suggest he rebels against.<sup>51</sup>

We might here return to the contrast between the work of conscience and the work of masochism in education. As outlined above, the key dimension of conscience is ‘consciousness of guilt as an expression of a tension between the ego and the super-ego’.<sup>52</sup> This is clearly in play in the duty the schoolboys feel towards their parents in completing their studies successfully. One of the introductory scenes of the film shows two of the boys criticising Neil Perry for obeying his father, while eventually admitting that they do the same with their parents. While these pupils may gain some pleasure from satisfying their parents desires for them, and they certainly suffer the pains of boredom and lost free time along the way, this is not an example of moral masochism but rather conscience. Moral masochism, as we have said, is different, in that it is largely undetectable by the person afflicted – the boys whom Keating lumps with guilt via his injunction to ‘seize the day’, that is to say for the absence of what could be called their own self-realization, are not aware that they

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<sup>51</sup> It is worth pointing out that our argument also differs from the analysis offered by McLaren and Leonardo (1998) who claim (unlike Dunne) that Keating’s inspirational, norm-breaking pedagogy, fails to meet the aims of revolutionary pedagogy. To do so, it must transcend ‘idiosyncratic acts of bourgeois transgression’ and the ‘performative moments of apostasy’ that we witness in the film (p. 139). This may be true, but McLaren and Leonardo’s analysis only perpetuates (in a way that is characteristic for critical pedagogy) a problematic vision of the redemptive pedagogue, whose very attachment to education, from our point of view, might be their most pernicious (because untroubled) inheritance. So, whilst we agree that the students ‘lack the ability to articulate a political project’ that allows them to transform the social conditions within which they are confined (p. 141), we do not assume that a more critically configured education, in the guise of a better Keating, is what they need. Rather, it might be necessary to interrogate the masochistic economy that Keating (either in his existing, or in an improved form) both represents and deepens.

<sup>52</sup> Freud, 2001a, 166-7.

are being made to feel guilt. They do not realise that they punish themselves with the whispered motto *Carpe Diem*, precisely because they also take pleasure in their ridiculously optimistic attempts to act it out. The ethical sense, which is primarily produced by the effects of the school and the parents on the conscience of the boys, employs the sadism of the super-ego to inflict its violence on the guilty subject, while the moral masochism of Mr Keating operates directly through the ego (in Freud's terms). This is why when watching *Dead Poets Society*, we must remember that 'the masochistic trend of the ego remains as a rule concealed from the subject and has to be inferred from his behaviour'. This is especially the case as the 'sadism of the super-ego', represented primarily by Headmaster Nolan, and the authoritarian father Mr Perry is, in Freud's words, again, 'glaringly conscious'.<sup>53</sup>

A key point of clarification to be made before proceeding with our reading of the film is that Keating is not only presented as a masochistic educator, but also a sadistic educator, who encourages masochistic psychologies in his students. By contrast, we would argue that the other educators (and Mr Perry) are, in fact, at once too educationally pragmatic (in the conventional sense) to exhibit any substantial sado-masochistic tendencies. Even the 'harsh' actions of the headmaster (when he paddles Charlie Dalton) or Mr Perry (when he threatens to withdraw Neil from Welton) are pragmatic rather than sadistic actions. The harsh pragmatism of the school is tied to the notion that severe discipline is what maintains their position as 'the best preparatory boys school in the United States' (as it is described in the film) – where the quality of the school is defined by the quota it sends to the 'Ivy League'. This reduction of education to instrumental ends is what the film overtly invites us to question. In doing so, it appears to critique the inherent violence of some educational relations, but this critique fails to identify and challenge their sado-masochistic component. The irony here is

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<sup>53</sup> Freud, 2001a, pp. 166-7.

that the non-sadistic and non-masochistic aspects of education are those which are under attack in the film. The film tries to teach us that this severe, pragmatic approach to education is hollow and superficial and that what we really need is an impassioned education which helps us reveal our true selves to ourselves, whatever the cost. In fact, the 'cost' is precisely what makes this more authentic education so visibly 'valuable'. This is the masochistic economy operating in education as the co-option of the drive.

The lesson of the film, then, is that we should not accept a form of schooling which neglects the inherent value of education in favour of its instrumentally driven 'double'. We should strive for 'authenticity' in education, even in a structural context (at least superficially) opposed to its existence or practice. The lingering question might then be: if this authentic education is supposedly so rare, why has the representation of it resonated with so many viewers? We argue that this is because the rhetoric of authenticity and inherent value is, in fact, not at all absent from the majority of educational discourse and practice, such as suggested by *Dead Poets Society*, and is, on the contrary, utterly ubiquitous.<sup>54</sup> In this sense, the film is at once a nightmare and a fantasy of education, polarizing two of its key principles and co-implicated economies: pragmatism and masochism. The only point in the film where these two polarities clearly meet and show mutual support for one another (in a manner which we suggest is far more representative of actual pedagogical dispositions) is in the scene after Charlie Dalton pretends to receive a phone call from God in school assembly, requesting that girls should be allowed into the school. This prank is significantly engendered by the production of Dalton's masochistic psychology through Keating's sadistic pedagogy, where the boys are taught to experience guilt for, amongst other things, not 'walking their own walk'. Keating, enhancing the sadism of his pedagogy, takes no responsibility for Dalton's behaviour and explains (with a

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<sup>54</sup> For a sustained engagement with this topic see, Ladkin, McKay & Bojesen, 2016.

reference to the mantra of the Dead Poets Society, whose Emersonian goal it is to ‘suck all the marrow out of life’) that ‘Sucking all the marrow out of life doesn’t mean choking on the bone’ and that ‘you being expelled from school is not daring to me, it’s stupid’, not least because, as he tells Dalton with a wry smile, being expelled from the school would mean he wouldn’t be able to attend Keating’s classes. He effectively explains to the boys that they should be both pragmatic and passionate, indicating (again contrary to Dunne’s reading) that the supposed ‘rebellion’ he advocates, only has sustainable value within the strictures of the pragmatic aspects of education. Thus, masochism acts as the support for pragmatism in education, or at least finds itself (and its inherent violence) articulated to the violently reductive demands of an accompanying pragmatic logic.

Though *Dead Poets Society* allows us to meditate on the mundane presence of masochism in educational environments, it does also explore the potential of that same masochism (with its shifting and necessarily unstable configuration of death and life-oriented drives), to exceed that mundane economy: a child commits suicide; a child is expelled; a teacher is sacked. And yet, this does not place the underpinning masochism of the film, and Keating’s pedagogy, in question. The audience is put in the position of experiencing a vicarious masochism through the educationally inspired self-destruction of Dalton, Perry, and Keating. As we have argued in our reading of Freud, the ‘[educated] subject’s destruction of himself cannot take place without libidinal satisfaction’.<sup>55</sup> And the audience loves it. This is nowhere better figured than in the final, now extremely famous, scene, where Keating’s exit is met with some of the boys taking to stand on the tables and proclaiming, ‘Captain, my captain’, in the middle of a suitably uninspiring lesson taken by the headmaster. The tragedy of Perry’s suicide appears overshadowed by the sacking of Keating. This apparently stirring scene, even now, remains in public consciousness. Its sustained

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<sup>55</sup> Freud, 2001a, p. 170.

resonance was exemplified in the wake of Robin Williams's 2014 suicide, where fans from across the world performed this scene in tribute to him. Why does this scene remain so affective? Our claim, which is really the major claim this paper seeks to make, is that, through co-opting the death drive (or the basic destructiveness and malice that is built into the Western educational tradition), education teaches us to take pleasure in pain, first and foremost within the workings of its own economies.

## Coda

We might emphasise, in concluding, that this reading of masochism in education is not a simple extension of Freudian theory to education. It reads Freud against himself insofar as Freud assigns education, together with other authorities (religion, government, etc.), the role of further developing the chastising, norm enforcing super-ego, which was set up following the dissolution of the Oedipus complex.<sup>56</sup> According to our reading, education is not simply a vehicle for enforcing the super-ego, serving its function in society as a 'cultural super-ego', as Freud later put it in *Civilization and its Discontents*.<sup>57</sup> Here too, we distance ourselves from a tendency amongst educational critics to constantly point out that education is an enforcer of cultural

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<sup>56</sup> See for example, Freud's account in *The Ego and the Id*: 'As a child grows up, the role of the father is carried on by teachers and others in authority; their injunctions and prohibitions remain powerful in the ego ideal [which is related to what Freud later calls the super-ego] and continue, in the form of conscience, to exercise moral censorship' (Freud, 2001b, p. 37). This point is repeated in 'The Economic Problem of Masochism': 'The course of childhood development leads to an ever-increasing detachment from parents, and their personal significance for the super-ego recedes into the background. To the imagos they leave behind there are then linked the influences of teachers and authorities, self-chosen models and publicly recognized heroes' (Freud, 2001a, p. 168).

<sup>57</sup> Freud, 2001c, p. 142.

norms. These norms, so the argument goes, are often left hidden within its operations, and by implication demand the intervention of the educational critic to reveal them. Freud would probably help complicate this. Though modern education conceptualised here as a super-ego enforcer, does inherit the precept: ‘You *ought to be* like this (like your father)’, that injunction is accompanied by the prohibition: ‘You *may not be* like this (like your father)’.<sup>58</sup> In other words, education consistently denies our achievement of the norms it compels us to pursue and, as such, reveals itself as a somewhat shady operator in its adoptive role as norm enforcer. But, in our reading, this is not its only function. Education helps constitute, and serves to support the mortification of the educational ego. Not simply operating from above as a disciplinarian overlord, education roots its oppressions within that ego. It does so to such great effect because it maintains a love of education that will not be diminished however uncomfortable the experience of education may become.

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<sup>58</sup> Freud, 2001b, p. 34.

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# Slow Science: Research and Teaching for Sustainable Praxis

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**O**ur purpose in this essay is to examine the nature and significance of what can be called the *slow science movement* within the contemporary discussion about higher education and scientific research. In broad strokes, slow science can be considered a humble, global and mainly virtual academic underground movement. It is clearly not mainstream. Rather, it is an alternative way of conceptualising criticisms of the changing nature of academic work, which is driven by intensification and instrumental rationality. It problematises and opposes fast policies in education,<sup>1</sup> characterised by academic capitalism or cognitive capitalism<sup>2</sup> and the corporatisation of universities,<sup>3</sup> questions the colonisation of academic minds and bodies<sup>4</sup> and formulates a sustainable alternative to the McDonaldization of the academic lifestyle.<sup>5</sup> Rather than representing a nostalgic longing for ‘the good old days’, characterised by universities as self-sufficient ivory

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<sup>1</sup> Peck and Theodore, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Peters and Bulut, 2012; Heikkinen 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Berg and Seeber, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Shahjahan, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Salo and Heikkinen 2010; Kivistö and Pihlström, 2018.

towers, slow science promotes research practices and communities with a high degree of engagement and critical reflexivity, considering the scientific and societal prerequisites as well as the means and outcomes of research. Regardless of the field of science, this calls on researchers to engage in the public sphere in order to construct a public intelligence in collaboration with both fellow researchers and citizens.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, researchers committed to the slow science movement cherish and defend their autonomy and expertise. This involves formulating the aims, choosing the relevant methods as well as examining and presenting the outcomes of research in accordance with the criteria of reliability and validity within the respective fields of science. Maintaining autonomy and expertise calls for independence in relation to policymakers, funding agencies, benchmarking, performance reports, annual reviews, rankings, metrics and impact factors.<sup>7</sup> Slow science is conscious of, ready and able to debate further conditions and practices that enable research and teaching as a sustainable collective praxis—practices that foster a good life for all human beings and humankind.<sup>8</sup>

The aim of this essay is two-fold. First, it aims to contextualise the discussion around the slow science movement by employing a wider debate on contemporary higher education and university research. Thus, the slow science movement is associated with critical reflections on the practices of economic rationality, managerialism, governance, accountability, efficiency, surveillance and commodification,<sup>9</sup> which are adopted by universities globally, and on the undermining and colonisation of the collectively creative, truly productive pace and rhythm of the everyday academic lifestyle. The intensification of academic work through economic rationality and corporate techniques thwarts the truly productive slow zones for reading, writing, collegial reflection and well-informed critical dialogue—i.e. collegial professional

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<sup>6</sup> Steegers, 2018, pp. 1–14.

<sup>7</sup> Haigh, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Kemmis, Wilkinson, Edwards Groves, Hardy, Grootenboer and Bristol, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Shahjahan, 2015, pp. 488–489.

competence, which is based on collaborative and cumulative knowledge creation and scientific quality assurance maintained by devoted peers.<sup>10</sup> As studied by Ylijoki and Mäntylä<sup>11</sup> and discussed by Berg and Seeber,<sup>12</sup> the fragmentation of time and energy—enhanced by project management, the standardisation of learning outcomes, administrative control and surveillance systems and the multitasking made possible by information and communication technology (ICT)—affects both the productivity and work satisfaction of academics. Short-termism<sup>13</sup> and the ‘culture of speed’<sup>14</sup> has effectively cut off ‘timeless time’ as a constituent of enthusiasm, fascination and immersion in research and teaching.

Second, the present essay aligns with the principles of slow science and practices that enable and foster research and teaching as a sustainable praxis. Collective professional praxis underlines the importance of respectful communication and collaboration, both within the community of researchers and between individual researchers and practitioners. It enhances the well-being of academics by nurturing a sense of belonging, meaningfulness, togetherness, trust and solidarity and stems from the desire of like-minded professionals to overcome their dissatisfactions and address issues that threaten their personal praxis. Emergent systems enable researchers and teachers to generate results that are greater than the sum of the elements involved. At best, in the emergence of science, different and complementary people work together. The collaborative emergence of people creates high-performance processes, which no single person has planned and no single person manages.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Menzies and Newson, 2007; Steegers, 2018, pp. 48–59.

<sup>11</sup> Ylijoki and Mäntylä, 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Berg and Seeber, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Haigh, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Berg and Seeber, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Berg and Seeber, 2016, pp. 71–90; Salo and Heikkinen, 2010.

## Sustainable praxis as an ideal of academic work

The very basis for our study is encapsulated in the concept of *sustainable praxis* as an ideal form of academic work. In short, the driving force of sustainable praxis are the intellectual curiosity and autonomous agency of academics. It is based on the desire to know more than before, guided by traditional academic values such as research autonomy and rational argumentation. Sustainable praxis is driven by what MacIntyre<sup>16</sup> calls *internal goods*, distinct from *external goods*. By external goods, we mean goods that we achieve through actions, but which are outside of these actions, such as money, fame and power. Conversely, internal goods are valued consequences or outcomes of actions which are inherently internal to the actions themselves. In other words, internal goods are valuable experiences that one achieves by being a participant of the practice. MacIntyre uses chess as an example of the distinction between internal and external goods. If children are given a candy every time they are engaged in a chess match, they learn to play for external goods. However, the experience of playing chess and learning to become a progressively better chess player renders the most satisfying reward to the player.

At best, meeting the challenge to become a better player becomes a *flow* experience,<sup>17</sup> whereby a person is fully immersed in a feeling of energised focus, full involvement and enjoyment in the practice. Likewise, in the context of academic work, a sustainable praxis refers to engagement in the academic practice as a value in itself, motivated by internal goods—doing research, living the life of a researcher. In sustainable academic praxis, scientific work itself renders the most important reward and satisfaction. Conversely, unsustainable praxis refers to instrumental action whose ends are mostly external to the means. The work is motivated by achieving better positions in the university hierarchy, obtaining funding, expanding publications lists and publishing in high-ranking journals.

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<sup>16</sup> MacIntyre, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, 1975.

To understand the concept of sustainable academic praxis, we need to refer to the origins of the concept of ‘praxis’ itself. The concept is derived from the philosophy of Aristotle and is based on the two different forms of practical knowledge and their related dispositions. Aristotle identified two kinds of practical knowledge, both situational and embedded in personal experience. One form is *techne*, the craft-like skill and knowledge needed in the material world to produce objects or outcomes separate from the person producing them (‘external goods’<sup>18</sup>). This knowledge advises *poiesis*-type action, which is ‘making action’. The other form is *phronesis*, the moral disposition to deliberate and act wisely and prudently in the social world in order to enable and promote a good and flourishing life for humans—*eudaimonia*. The human action informed by *phronesis* is called *praxis*. In *praxis*, the goods achieved through action are typically ‘internal goods’. In other words, whereas in *poiesis* the driving force of action is instrumental rationality, in *praxis*, humans are committed to promoting a good life for themselves and for each other, which is the supreme good.<sup>19</sup> When it comes to the academic form of life, sustainable praxis is not manifested as efficacy in acting, performing or making decisions in the context and situation at hand. Rather, it is judged over time and, more broadly, as being worthy of decency. In what follows, we exemplify and discuss contemporary constraints and challenges undermining academic work and research as sustainable praxis.

## Quick fixes and instant delivery at McUniversity

In contemporary academia, life is fast-paced, and demands are voluminous and ambiguous. Urgency and impatience, high speed, unremarked entrances and exits characterise the traffic on the academic speedway. Prerequisites and conditions of knowledge production seem to have fully embraced McDonald’s service and delivery practices—from fast food to fast science! This transition

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<sup>18</sup> McIntyre, 2011,

<sup>19</sup> Aristotle, 2003; MacIntyre, 2011.

has been conceptualised by Peck and Theodore<sup>20</sup> as ‘fast policies’. What counts are ‘ideas that work’. Fast policies are based on the rapid circulation of ‘new policy ideas’, fads and fashions that travel around the globe at social-media speed. This also applies to educational reforms and is manifested through policy borrowing and the use of ‘one size fits all’ models in the new context, regardless of geographical, economic, political, demographic or other differences. The fast circulation of decontextualised policies is enabled by a smooth transnational connectivity between policy-making arenas and modes of policy development in a perpetually accelerating and increasingly interconnected world. This also applies to higher education and academic work. Menzies and Newson,<sup>21</sup> among others, note that universities are no longer refugees from the mundane hustle-bustle slow zones ‘for reading and reflection, critical dialogue and knowledge creation’. The practices of managerialism, accountability and quality assurance that have largely been adopted in universities are seriously undermining the traditional pace and rhythm of everyday academic life. Berg and Seeber<sup>22</sup> discuss the loss of well-being due to the pervasive time pressures and stress among academics at the ‘corporate university’ and emphasise time as the common factor in the ‘values’ of productivity, efficiency and competition.

Productivity is about getting a number of tasks done in a set unit of time, efficiency is about getting tasks done quickly; and competition, in part, is about marketing your achievements before someone else beats you to it. Corporatization, in short, has sped up the clock.<sup>23</sup>

Besides the fact that corporatisation has led to the prioritisation of hot research topics and areas, it has infiltrated the academic mindset, affecting the way in which researchers think about and relate to their research practices and how they actually conduct their research. The quest for productivity and efficiency forces researchers to rush into findings and to focus on what is easily

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<sup>20</sup> Peck and Theodore, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Menzies and Newson, 2007, p. 83.

<sup>22</sup> Berg and Seeber, 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Berg and Seeber, 2016, p. 8.



quantifiable and marketable. The hero-entrepreneurs at the corporate university have adopted efficient practices of time management and multitasking.<sup>24</sup> The ‘good academic citizen’ at the neoliberal academy is constantly able and willing to initiate new projects, accumulate research and/or development grants in line with strategies and priorities and to deliver rapid and instant answers to external stakeholders.<sup>25</sup> There might even be the occasional innovation. Moreover, maintaining the status of academic citizenry presumes the capacity for extensive publishing. The fact that published results are often preliminary and partial, and ‘the maturity of the findings is either ignored, presumed, feigned, or hidden beneath layers of statistical significance’, is of no interest.<sup>26</sup> This is the era of fast science with fast delivery. Research activities are to be performed—both in the sense of accomplishing and in the sense of presenting a task or function—in an entertaining manner. This is done without formulating and asking the inconvenient questions of what, how and why; without reflecting on sustainability; without claiming autonomy and expertise; without anchoring research activities in larger communities—within and outside academia. Meanwhile, slow professors cling to their academic agency and advocate scientific realism. Their aim is to restore their emotional and intellectual integrity and resilience by acting with purpose and by preserving time for collegial and collaborative deliberation, dialogue and reflection.<sup>27</sup>

Fragmentation of time and energy, enhanced by the multitasking made possible by ICT and mobile devices, affects both the productivity and work satisfaction of academics.<sup>28</sup> The time fragmentation and intensification of academic work are rooted in the neoliberalisation of higher education in various forms and techniques for governing, monitoring and evaluating research and

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<sup>24</sup> Berg and Seeber, 2016, pp. 14–32.

<sup>25</sup> Shahjahan, 2015, p. 492.

<sup>26</sup> Haigh, 2017, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Berg and Seeber, 2016, p. 11; Haigh, 2017, p.1.

<sup>28</sup> Ylijoki & Mäntylä, 2003.

teaching.<sup>29</sup> However, these techniques seem to contradict the very nature of academic work and forms of life. One prominent example of the McDonaldization of academic work are the so-called quality assurance procedures. Researchers appear to be deeply frustrated by the consequences of the techniques of new public management (NPM). Efforts aimed at managing the allocation of working time through an online database have led to bizarre outcomes. For example, in Finland, the software used for time allocation (e.g. Sole TM, Reportronic) recognises 7.35 hours of work every working day, no more, no less. However, academic work, including thinking and reflecting, is not something that can be atomised in this instrumental and fragmentary manner. One cannot stop thinking or discussing after one leaves the office. A counterweight is that, sometimes, you are not at your best in your office at a given time; you might be elsewhere doing something else. As a result of this fluidity in academic work, researchers put imaginary decimal numbers in the database, while in reality, they work almost regardless of the clock. This takes place at the same time as academics widely discuss the ethics of doing science and when the McDonaldization of the university, ICT and global networks result in new possibilities and forms of misconduct in research.<sup>30</sup>

It is essential to ask what kinds of impacts these kinds of systems and techniques have on the ethical foundations of academic work. The time allocation system represents a kind of double bookkeeping, whereby academics are forced to knowingly enter fictitious figures into the database. This has definite and profoundly demoralising effects on academic work. The parallels with the former Soviet Union's dual economy are obvious. It is paradoxical that the reforms underlying neoliberalism parade as human freedom and the abundance of options. When applied to academic work, however, the opposite seems true. Neoliberalism is based on the view that competition enhances and restructures human practices. In this line of thought, the market is expected to constitute a self-regulating system in which individual actors find

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<sup>29</sup> Shahjahan, 2015, pp. 488-489.

<sup>30</sup> Varantola, 2012.

their place in the economy according to the laws of natural choice; individuals compete with each other in the same way as the evolution of stronger species take precedence over weaker ones.<sup>31</sup> There is obviously a cold logic in neoliberalism. The indicators used (e.g. the number of degrees, publications) show that the scientific “production” is increasing. According to existing statistics, scientific work is made more effective along with NPM. Yet, what else is on this track? It seems that it makes people cynical, and they begin to treat others in an instrumental way. At the same time, neoliberalism seems to bring about alienation, anxiety and depression.<sup>32</sup>

## Slow research

Science needs time. It needs time for thought, time for reflection, time for making mistakes and more time for correcting those mistakes. It develops slowly. Years of churning at the same material maybe punctuated by rare and unpredictable leaps of insight like those described by Kuhn (2012). However such insights emerge as the consequence of hard won field trial and long experience.<sup>33</sup>

Haigh’s statement relates to applied environmental sciences. He presents two case studies, a 15-year study on landslide magnitude and frequency in Himalaya and a 10-year study on the effects of the use of land fertilisers in South Wales. Both studies underline the importance of slow and patient long-term research. In the case of land fertiliser use, data collected 10 years after adding fertilisers during tree planting suggested opposite conclusions compared with ‘a snapshot’ after two years. In the long term, adding fertilisers proved to be worthwhile.

Haigh contextualises his case studies within slow science, advocating patience, carefulness, receptiveness, reflection and mindfulness—a sustainable research praxis. He updates the

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<sup>31</sup> Hayek, 1945; Hilpelä, 2004.

<sup>32</sup> Hilpelä, 2004; Julkunen, Nätti and Anttila, 2004.

<sup>33</sup> Haigh, 2017, p. 1.

branches of slow movement<sup>34</sup> to include slow *living*, slow *marketing*, slow *technology*, slow *geography*, slow *journalism* and slow *television*. Slow *science*, as initially formulated in appeals and manifestos on the internet, relies on the idea of a slow, calm, quiet and curiosity-driven research based on independent and critical inquiry at the service of society and human kind as a whole.<sup>35</sup> Slow science relies on the inherent values of research, researchers and the academic form of life as sustainable praxis. The novelty and creativity of research findings might be by-products of the researcher being absorbed in an enjoyable and satisfactory manner in research practices. Slow science relies on a collective praxis, dependent on wondering, thinking, discussing and sharing in recurring cycles. Time and space are the essential resources for exercising professional judgement, for imagining (radical) alternatives, for critical playfulness and for ‘exposure to diversity and difference regarding ways of seeing and being in the world’—the attributes of solid creative scientific work.<sup>36</sup>

We are well aware that slow science might, at first glance, depict itself as a resurrected grandmother in a rocking chair, the lost romantic stranger in ‘the publish or perish culture’ of contemporary academia. Still, at a time when the number of publications are to be maximised (by presenting preliminary and partial results), peer reviews written in haste, research projects and grants tightly scheduled and performance strictly targeted, slow science finds itself on a view that true creativity and new insights are nurtured in peace at a slow pace. Science worthy of its history, institutions, methodologies and contributions to the development of humanity is based on loose schedules that allow, at times guide, us to pursue the side paths of the stray. There is always plenty of time for long reflective walks and enjoyment of the fragrance of roses. Substantial and sustainable research findings might be a combination of fumbling, making serious mistakes, in-depth reflection, collegial dialogue and recurrent interpretations and

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<sup>34</sup> E.g. Honoré, 2004.

<sup>35</sup> E.g. Slow Science Academy, 2010, [https://www.petities24.com/slow\\_science\\_manifesto](https://www.petities24.com/slow_science_manifesto).

<sup>36</sup> Mahon, Heikkinen and Huttunen, 2018, p. 9.

analysis. Scientific work performed in this manner reminds us of both the English and Swedish etymology of the word research. In English or French (*recherche*), it actually refers to the ‘act of searching closely’. In the Swedish concept, ‘undersökning’ gives the impression of finding something valuable beneath the surface, underneath what we are able to see with our eyes (under = under; söka = search).

The outcome of the abovementioned logic of reasoning might intimate that slow science is favoured by pre-modern, romantic and soft humanists. Paradoxically, however, the concept was invented within ‘the hard sciences’, medicine and information science. The concept of slow was, arguably, first used by an information scientist Ernst A. Garfield.<sup>37</sup> The irony is that he is also the ‘father’ of the bibliometric and is, therefore, liable for the ‘impact factor’.<sup>38</sup> In Garfield’s view, slow science relates to quiet, persistent and invisible everyday work. It does not result in a number of publications or exhaustingly long curriculum vitae. It is rooted in quality, matured through slow research processes. Garfield used the discovery of DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) in the late 1940s as an example of slow science. The breakthrough relied on protracted, intermittent and exhausting scientific work, from which the number of publications was initially very low. When the results were finally completed, DNA became a scientific breakthrough. Similar examples can be drawn from the recent history of science, for example, the development of analytical techniques or bootstrapping in statistics.<sup>39</sup> Nobel Prize winners are rarely young academic career missiles; rather, they are generally true academics who have done persistent work, and in most cases, they have retired from their academic posts. An example is Peter Higgs, a Nobel Prize laureate from 2013, who presented, together with his colleagues, the first paper on the topic of Higgs boson in the early 1960s. Biochemist Lisa Alleva<sup>40</sup> is another early proponent of slow science. She rediscovered ‘the traditional ideal’,

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<sup>37</sup> Garfield, 1990.

<sup>38</sup> Gosselain, 2011.

<sup>39</sup> Anon, 2015, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> Alleva, 2006.

the very basic principle of making science, in a small laboratory. Alleva and her colleagues had the possibility and freedom to formulate the starting points and research questions by reviewing the literature and exploring earlier studies within the field in a slow, thoughtful and thorough manner. Thereafter, they planned their experiments with great care and executed research strategies with prudence. They did not plough through genomes with a desire for discovery. Instead, they formulated a theory, executed experiments and, finally, tested the theory—performing a sustainable research praxis.

## Slow teaching

For the hero-entrepreneur scientists at the corporate university who are teaching and giving classes as a must-do duty, a task distinctive from and interfering with ‘truly productive’ research activities, this means application and publication activities. Within the neoliberal discourse of higher education, learning is conceptualised in terms of learning outcomes, as a product or process leading to behavioural changes or accumulation of human capital, which ought to be accomplished, evaluated and measured as interchangeable units of performance.<sup>41</sup> Slow researchers relate to teaching—that is, the reciprocal and collaborative construction of research-like learning environments based on enthusiasm, inspiration, pleasure, playfulness, authenticity and a sense of belonging—as a site for testing ideas and plans for research and/or contemplating existing bodies of knowledge in intellectual collaboration with students. In our view, slow teaching is not about ‘giving’ students more time to read, think, explore and learn. It goes beyond a linear concept of time, time being understood and handled as a resource. Slow teaching focuses on being present, on the quality of attention enhanced by collective self-awareness and self-reflection. Further, slow teaching embraces listening, pondering, pacing and narrating.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Shahjahan, 2015, pp. 497-498.

<sup>42</sup> Berg and Seeber, 2016, pp. 40-49; Hart, 2004, pp. 5-9.

Berg and Seeber,<sup>43</sup> alongside Shahjahan,<sup>44</sup> question the contemporary discourse of teaching and learning within higher education, firmly anchored in the duality of mind and body. Within a mind-centred framework, learning is understood merely as a cognitive activity taking place in a transcendent brain. Classes are inhabited by quiet, individual, immobile, silenced bodies, invisibilized for the sake of focusing on producing, perceiving and interpreting the ‘word’.<sup>45</sup> Slow teaching recognizes the embodiment of knowing as well as the contextual, situational and physical enablers and constraints of being present, involved and engaged in the human interaction labelled as ‘teaching’ in higher education. Slow teaching acknowledges the importance of sensations, emotions and sensory ways of knowing. It nurtures presence, attention and focus by ritualising learning through exercises in relaxation, deep breathing, silence and listening. Bodies can be reconnected into the classroom by the use of music, drama, humour and other sensory experiences. The process of dislodging the personhood that is characteristic of the neoliberal corporate university, grounded in thinking on scarcity, has to begin with a new vision of researchers, teachers and students.

Slowing down disrupts a subjectivity that ties time with rationality or productivity, or, more importantly, with being civilized or modern. It is about inviting abundance thinking in the present and the focus on our bodies now for its own intrinsic value as knowledge producer, rather than later, or for some extrinsic value.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Berg and Seeber, 2016, pp. 33–40.

<sup>44</sup> Shahjahan, 2015, pp. 497–498.

<sup>45</sup> Shahjahan, 2015, p. 495.

<sup>46</sup> Shahjahan, 2015, p. 498.

## Slow science as an open, collective and public praxis

A slow scientific process includes surprising and unpredictable findings. Although careful planning is essential, the research process may reveal a whole new range of perspectives. As a result, the research direction might be changed in part or even completely. Such unpredictable factors are well-recognised in the tradition of action research within the field of education. Corey,<sup>47</sup> the pioneer of action research, emphasised that there should be an opportunity to change the original issues addressed in the original plan so that the research can reflect the complex, transformed reality. Whyte<sup>48</sup> uses the term ‘creative surprises’ for these unexpected emerging findings and ideas. McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead,<sup>49</sup> in turn, describe the natural by-paths as ‘side-spirals’. Discovery of something unexpected refers to ‘serendipity’.<sup>50</sup> However, Liedman<sup>51</sup> emphasises that serendipity is not only a matter of good luck; discoveries are dependent on wisdom, curiosity and concentration. Otherwise, the explorer would not know that the findings are rare.

Besides openness to surprising and unpredictable findings, the tradition and practices of action research underline the importance of respectful communication and collaboration, both within the community of researchers and between individual researchers and practitioners. Collective praxis in academia, as experienced and described by Smith, Salo and Grootenboer,<sup>52</sup> nurtures a sense of belonging, meaningfulness, togetherness, trust and solidarity. It is a ‘capacity building model of intellectual engagement that builds communication and partnership’. It stems from ‘the desire of like-minded professionals to overcome the dissatisfactions and addresses issues that threaten their personal praxis’.<sup>53</sup> The pressure

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<sup>47</sup> Corey, 1949.

<sup>48</sup> Whyte, 1991.

<sup>49</sup> McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead, 1996.

<sup>50</sup> De Sousa, 2011.

<sup>51</sup> Liedman, 2001.

<sup>52</sup> Smith, Salo and Grootenboer, 2010.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.



of effective production, combined with the fragmentation of academic work processes, results in temporal alienation and superficiality, both in terms of academic handicraft and the social interactions included in it.<sup>54</sup> Personal praxis becomes disconnected from collective praxis. The very basis and means of making science as a collective endeavour is lost, without the possibility of processing ideas and training argumentation and without making deeper meaning by listening and participating, criticising and interrogating each other.<sup>55</sup> It is important to note that original and innovative deliberative communication and action require, in addition to horizontal relations, recognition and the inclusion of diverse interests, perspectives, interpretations and identities. Multiple voices, as in the case of the ideal of study circles,<sup>56</sup> such as Keijo Räsänen<sup>57</sup> and his colleagues, use the concept of ‘academic praxis in emergence’ as an outcome whereby researchers perpetually articulate and negotiate somewhat coherent answers to three questions, each representing one of three stances: tactical (*how to do this?*), political (*what to accomplish and achieve by doing this?*) and moral (*why aim at these goals in this manner?*).

Openness and transparency in research, not just within academia, but also in the public sphere, is related to the three questions above. In an era of social media, researchers have opportunities to present, discuss and, at times, refine their work in progress openly and in communication with the public. Information scientist Erik Proper<sup>58</sup> argues for replacing the practice of *publish-fast* with that of *observe-think-debate-experience-debate-think-debate-publish*, in which some of the deliberations take place outside academia, for example, in the blogosphere. In this field of research, fundamental questions and problems need to be articulated in collaboration with practitioners and users over an extended period. Winfield<sup>59</sup> argues that slowing down and publicly debating

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<sup>54</sup> Menzies and Newson, 2007.

<sup>55</sup> Smith, Salo and Grootenboer, 2010, pp. 63–65; Gosselain, 2011.

<sup>56</sup> Larsson, 2001.

<sup>57</sup> Räsänen, 2008.

<sup>58</sup> Proper, 2009.

<sup>59</sup> Winfield, 2011.

ongoing research has benefits. First, it enables a collective acknowledging and understanding of the ethical and societal impacts of the research in progress. Second, it likely enhances the awareness of the unintended consequences of the research at hand. Open science conducted in a peaceful manner can also result in increased trust between academia and the public. Ongoing communication can make the popularisation of science redundant and complement the teaching of science in schools and universities. Still, the conditions for presenting scientific work in progress and refining it in public spheres, such as social media, have become a true challenge. In times of fake news and trolling, when emotionally charged, delimited and strongly exaggerated personal, political and nationalistic claims and viewpoints form the agenda of public interest and discussion. Communication and learning in a sustainable collective praxis requires listening skills. Welton<sup>60</sup> identifies learning to listen as one of the main challenges of the pedagogies of civic education. The capability of listening to others is actually not self-evident. Contemporary Western knowledge culture and mass media society are not equipped with a sensitive ear for dialogue. The erosion of solidarity in the lifeworld weakens our ability and willingness to listen and, thus, communicates at a pace that enables meaning-making and sustainable human development.

According to Denzin and Lincoln,<sup>61</sup> creative scientific work is at best a ‘bricolage’: it is a creative and free combination of various things. ‘Bricolage’ presupposes divergent thinking, allowing participants to combine and play with things in an unprejudiced way. Bricolage is about crossing conventions and boundaries. The word ‘bricolage’ comes from the French language and means a kind of work in which materials of different types are put together. Scientific breakthroughs often involve this kind of emergence, which is based on a creative playfulness. Emergent systems generate results that are greater than the sum of the elements involved. At best, in a scientific emergence, different and complementary expertise come together and challenge and

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<sup>60</sup> Welton, 2002.

<sup>61</sup> Denzin and Lincoln, 2005.

complement each other in a ground-breaking manner. Collaborative emergence creates a high-performance process that is beyond planning and management. How, therefore, does the NPM of universities enable emergence? We are very sceptical of whether this question can be answered. One of the best facilitators of emergence is freedom. Researchers must therefore be encouraged to partake in informal interaction and free-form play with new ideas. Freedom allows new associations and perspectives in which alternative interpretations and inventions may arise. New openings often take place in informal situations, not necessarily meant to be included in research projects.

## Slow Time

Even if technology makes life comfortable and fast-paced, the human brain has its own pace, not to be rushed beyond its capacities. An urgent question is how fast can a human being think? O'Carroll<sup>62</sup> argues for a dual temporal existence. Beyond the rationalist discourse characteristic of industrial work, in which time is represented as quantitative, organised and manageable, there is another temporal reality. In this reality, time constructs itself as a qualitative, lived variable, encompassing thought, imagination and sociability. In organisations such as universities, socially shared perceptions of time function both as external constraints and as cultural resources. Academics organise their experiences, make sense of their lives and themselves and relate to their work through a multitude of temporal aspects and dimensions. In the study of Ylijoki and Mäntylä<sup>63</sup> on time perspectives in academic work, the authors identify four complementary and contradictory time perspectives. 'Scheduled' and 'contracted time' relate to rationalist, organised and manageable time. 'Personal time' relates to human existence and life as a whole, the life cycle from birth to death and the question of what is a good life. The meaning of work and life for a person

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<sup>62</sup> O'Carroll, 2008.

<sup>63</sup> Ylijoki and Mäntylä, 2003.

is reflected in his or her closest social relations among family members and relatives as well as in the physical and mental coping of academics. It is a question of whether they can have time to rest and whether they can live some life moments without research. The fourth time dimension,<sup>64</sup> ‘timeless time’, relates to the capability of academics to throw themselves into the natural flow of time:

Timeless time is not subjected to any kinds of external pressures and demands. [...] it refers to internally motivated use of time in which clock time loses its significance. In this sense timeless time involves transcending time and one’s self and becoming entirely immersed in the task at hand. [...] long working hours [...] stem from academics own enthusiasm, fascination and immersion in their work. [...] this time perspective is devoted to academic research, especially to reading, writing, thinking, and having intellectual discussions in peace and quiet. Based on autonomy and freedom, academic research is characterized as being carried out beyond all mundane concerns and temporal limitations.

In her study on time in the knowledge industry, O’Carroll<sup>65</sup> identifies ‘intangible time’, which is simultaneously connected and disconnected to timeless time. It refers to the unconscious processing of information and ideas taking place while doing something other than working. Intangible time is peripheral to core activities identified as work. It can be brought about during physical exercise or when relaxing while taking care of one’s duties beyond work. Intangible time also reminds us of the importance of hobbies. The concept of ‘hobby’ is etymologically related to children’s toyhorse (*hobyn*) and connected to a notion of an ‘activity that doesn’t go anywhere’.<sup>66</sup>

## Slow science – for a life worth living

The principles and practices of slow science are slowly expanding within research. Yet, they are meaningful and relevant to human togetherness and sustainable living in general. The ultimate

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>65</sup> O’Carroll, 02008, pp. 185–187.

<sup>66</sup> Online etymology dictionary.

purposes of the slow movement are the promotion of sustainable local lifestyles, balance between humans and nature and a defence of the life world. Paradoxically, slow science might actually produce quick scientific breakthroughs. However, there has to be both time and space to be able to wonder beyond quality systems, action plans and work packages. Slow science is deliberative, open and public. It offers new opportunities for outreach work and sustainability. It is non-profit and co-operative, nurtured by activities and discussions, beyond traditional institutions, on open platforms of various kinds. Slow science is genuinely critical and is based on sustaining trust. It is about learning to understand oneself and one's own pace and living in accordance with one's limitations and possibilities. It is also a question of leadership and understanding that human beings differ and that the demands on them, therefore, have to be different.

The slow scientific ideal is reminiscent of Aristotle's idea of a good life—*eudaimonia*—which he presents in *Nicomachean Ethics*. For Aristotle, the three most favoured lives are the life of gratification, the life of political activity and the life of study. The work of a researcher is a lifelong inquiry into the world and human being, with the aim of reaching the good life, one that is worth living. According to Aristotle,<sup>67</sup> human *happiness* or whether one has lived a *good life* (*eudaimonia*) can best be evaluated posthumously. Many of us seem to achieve and perform a great deal during our lives, but only time will tell which acts and ideas were good, durable and worthy of adoption. Only time will prove whether a person contributed to a good life for mankind and humanity during her or his lifetime or whether his or her lifetime was taken up with trivial pursuits. Time is the most objective assessment of sustainable praxis, including in science. Nature has its limits, and so does the human capacity, since human is nature.

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<sup>67</sup> Aristotle, 1999.

## Endnote

This essay develops, extends and updates arguments and perspectives on slow science, published earlier by the authors. In Finnish Salo, P. & Heikkinen, H.L.T. (2010). Slow Science: vaihtoehto yliopiston macdonaldisoitumiselle. Tieteessä tapahtuu, nr. 6/2010, 28-31. In english Salo, P. & Heikkinen, L.T. 820119. Slow Science: an alternative to macdonaldization of the academic lifestyle. Available on-line:

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## Ritual, Reform and Resistance in the Schoolified University – On the Dangers of Faith in Education and the Pleasures of Pretending to Taking it Seriously

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hy is there such a striking discrepancy between the flexibility, democracy and empowerment that the Bologna process aims for, and the superficial educational activities that it actually results in? Our answer is based on the ritual theory of the American anthropologist Roy Rappaport and the psychoanalytical framework of the Austrian philosopher Robert Pfaller. Interpreting schoolified education as a ritual, we argue that both the reform initiative and its ensuing educational activities should be interpreted as mainly productive of a certain appearance, of compliance with prominent norms of modern society: the norms are articulated in policy documents and enacted in educational activity. We take schoolified education to be a normal ritual, in that this appearance is accepted ‘as if’ it corresponded with reality, while at the same time most people are aware (in a certain sense) of its superficial and ritualistic character. A twist, however, is added by the fact that modern society is distinctly anti-ritualistic, and therefore constantly tries to make education work ‘for real’. Drawing on Pfaller’s distinction between *belief* and *faith*, we show that this pursuit of

de-ritualisation actually makes education progressively more formalised and coercive.

## Introduction

Guided by the Bologna protocol, reform of universities in Europe is directed towards a vision of a ‘common European framework’, in which students can move freely between different national contexts (mobility) and where it is transparent what students are expected to learn (learning outcomes), how they are expected to learn (learning activities), and what competencies each individual student has acquired by learning (ECTS credits). From being understood as a transfer of knowledge through teaching, university studies are reconceptualised as the organisation of activities for student centred learning, utilising a variety of methodologies, adapted to the needs and desires of individual students. While one central and much discussed goal of these efforts is to make the European economy more competitive, the reform initiative also aims at student empowerment and the strengthening of democratic institutions.<sup>1</sup>

This does not mean, however, that higher education in Europe has recently become more effective, flexible and democratic. Quite on the contrary. In fact, the problem that lies at the centre of this article is the striking discrepancy between the intention of the Bologna protocol and some of its actual results.

We will show what we mean by describing a higher education programme that is designed to follow the tenets of the Bologna protocol, namely the teacher education programme at the University of Gothenburg.<sup>2</sup> This programme aims for about 200 learning outcomes, distributed over 35 courses. It is compulsory

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<sup>1</sup> Information about the Bologna process can be found at [ehea.info](http://ehea.info).

<sup>2</sup> It follows that the programme is intended to follow the guidelines of the Bologna protocol from Hesslefors, Elisabeth, Jan Carle and Hélène Engberg, 2010.

for all students to take the courses in a predefined order, to ensure their equivalent progression in learning. Each course is more or less meticulously described in a course guide, used by both teachers and students, specifying not only the course literature and the content and order of lectures, but also the learning activities of individual seminars. The purpose of these course guides is explained in the educational idea programme of the University of Gothenburg, where one can read that it is necessary to make clear *what* students are expected to do, *how* they are expected to do it, *when* they are expected to do different things and *why* they are expected to do this ‘in order to make them feel “safe”, and thus help them engage with the learning process in full’.<sup>3</sup>

One of the first courses that students encounter in this programme is *Learning, development and didactics 1*. It provides 7.5 ECTS credits, corresponding to five weeks of study, and consists of 32 lectures and 8 seminars, for about 300 students each year. The course guide describes how these students are divided into 18 seminar groups, taught more or less simultaneously by different seminar leaders. Each of these seminar groups is further divided into base-groups of 4 to 6 students. The course guide contains instructions for what teachers as well as students should do, in each of the seminars. For instance, before seminar 6 the students are instructed to meet in their base-groups to discuss questions provided in the course guide, pertaining to specific pages in the course literature. The seminar leader is instructed to use the first half of the seminar to discuss these questions and to clarify specific concepts in the course literature (a list in the course guide specifies which concepts need to be clarified). The second half of seminar 6 is to be devoted to discussions in subject-groups, i.e. groups constructed according to the school subject of the different student teachers. The lecturers involved in this course typically

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<sup>3</sup> Utbildningsnämnden vid Göteborgs universitet, 2015. Concerning the idea that students must feel ‘safe’ to be able to learn, see Furedi, 2016.

have not researched on the subject matter they are lecturing on, or, if they have, are unable to use literature connected to their research. Instead, the course circles around ‘student literature’, written specifically for this type of higher education programmes (and most probably almost exclusively read within such programmes).

What we wish to show with this example is that the general intentions of the Bologna protocol can lead to the complete opposite, in the process of concretisation and implementation. For instance, while the intention is to empower students and make education more flexible and engaging, in the process of implementing the Bologna protocol, the teacher education programme in Gothenburg has become a rigid organisational entity, where individual students as well as teachers have little scope to directly influence the methods and subject matter of the educational activities in which they take part. As we will argue below, the very ambition to improve higher education by formal means has, in this case, resulted in a kind of inversion, actually making higher education worse as a result.<sup>4</sup> It is the dynamics of such inversion that we wish to explain in this article.

In our title, we have followed critics of the Bologna process and termed the resulting type of education *schoolified*. This term refers to ‘the utilisation of models for knowledge-transfer typical of schools, in other settings where learning takes place, such as pre-schools, families, holiday camps and universities’.<sup>5</sup> Characteristic of such models are: ‘fixed curricula, teaching and learning organised around classes, external guidance instead of self-directed learning, a high number of compulsory courses, seminars with compulsory attendance, frequent examinations, small scope for choice and a subject matter consisting of canonised “school” knowledge’.<sup>6</sup> Another critic of the Bologna

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<sup>4</sup> Such inversion is also the topic of Lundin, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Kühl, 2011, p. 2f.

<sup>6</sup> Winter, 2009, pp. 49-50, slightly modified and translated by Sverker Lundin.



process mentions the exclusion of a number of possibilities that were previously characteristic of high quality university studies: ‘to be able to study, early on, other subject matter than “basics”, to learn together with more experienced students, the freedom to develop and follow one’s personal interests, the connection between research and teaching’.<sup>7</sup>

It should be clear that the teacher education in Gothenburg has many of these characteristics. For instance, its curricula can only be modified through formalised procedures and in the form of course guides the curricula are rather detailed; teaching and learning is organised around classes; while learning activities are not always guided directly by teachers, their form is certainly determined by others than the students themselves; attendance is often compulsory and it is compulsory for teachers to record which students are present; since almost all courses in the teacher education programme are mandatory to take in a predefined order, students have little scope for choice; controversial or difficult subject matter is to a large extent excluded from teaching; students only study together with other students in the same stage of the programme, thus excluding exchange between students with different levels of experience.

A central role in our analysis of schoolified education is played by the concept of *ritual*. Although it might seem obvious that the formalism schooling can be called ‘ritualistic’, it is our impression that Richard Quantz’ assessment – made almost 20 years ago – that ‘with only a few notable exceptions, little has actually been done to develop ritual into a key component of the social analysis of education’, is still largely valid.<sup>8</sup>

The word ‘ritual’ originally referred to ‘a book directing the way rites should be performed [...] a script (including texts to be uttered and instructions on how and by whom as well as on the

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<sup>7</sup> Pfaller, 2011, p. 38, translated by Sverker Lundin.

<sup>8</sup> Quantz, 1999, p. 493. Some exceptions are: Boli, 1989; Illich, 1971; Meyer and Rowan, 1977.

accompanying actions, etc.) for behaviour'.<sup>9</sup> It was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century that our present day 'anthropological' concept of ritual referring to a particular type of religious behaviour emerged. Within anthropology, ritual then became associated with the irrationality and errors of 'primitive people' – something which had little to do with the original rather neutral meaning of ritual, as a guide to the correct performance of a rite.<sup>10</sup> This original meaning was neutral, because it was not assumed, as anthropologists started to do in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that the participants were unaware of the fact that they were performing a rite, following a script.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the alleged irrationality of so-called 'primitive' people became a topic of theoretical debate within anthropology.<sup>11</sup> The distinction between moderns and non-moderns was further confounded by critical accounts of modernity, expressed by philosophers such as Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Freud and more recently developed also by historians who discuss the 'theological' origin and nature of modernity itself.<sup>12</sup> It is against the background of this theoretical development that we wish to suggest that the concept of ritual can be applied to education.

Of course, the concept of ritual has been used to analyse education before, for instance by Peter McLaren.<sup>13</sup> In his analysis, however, the concept of ritual is used to highlight what one could call *the presence of the non-modern* – the religious and symbolic – in education, thus showing that education is not as 'modern' as we moderns like to believe. Our approach is different, in that we wish to apply the concept of ritual to the *core*

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<sup>9</sup> Asad, 1993, p. 58.

<sup>10</sup> See Bell, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g., Rappaport, 1999 and Latour, 1993.

<sup>12</sup> Milbank, 2006; Gillespie, 2008; Pfau, 2013. Studies of the specific theological origin of education are also relevant, such as Oelkers, Osterwalder and Tenorth, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> McLaren, 1986.

of education, to the highly structured activities that allegedly result in the production of knowledge. While McLaren basically accepts this core as modern and allows for it to be interpreted in terms of learning and knowledge – if surrounded by a sea of unnoticed and unacknowledged rituals and symbols – we will try to show that the very dynamics of education itself can be fruitfully explained in anthropological terms.

Importantly, as the theoretical developments described above indicate, this approach of ours does not imply that teachers and students are somehow irrational and mistaken when they accept and participate in education. Instead, the very question of how participants conceive of their own (secular, bureaucratised) activity is at the centre of our analysis. In fact, drawing on the cultural theory of the Austrian philosopher Robert Pfaller, we will argue that it does not hold, as Quantz contended, that ‘the more we recognise it as a ritual, the less likely it is to affect us’.<sup>14</sup> On the contrary, as we will explain, critical analysis of ritual may actually drive a process of further ritualisation.<sup>15</sup>

## Schoolified education as ritual

Let us turn now to our analysis of schoolified education as ritual, using the teacher education programme presented above as our main example. As a starting point, let us compare it to the American anthropologist Roy Rappaport’s very useful definition of the ‘ritual form’.<sup>16</sup> According to this definition, it is characteristic for rituals that performers ‘follow, more or less punctiliously, orders established or taken to have been established, by others’. Furthermore, ‘[b]ehavior in ritual tends to be punctilious and repetitive’. Rituals are regularly repeated ‘at times established by clock, calendar [...] or defined social circumstance’, and they are ‘performed in specified contexts [...]

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<sup>14</sup> Quantz, O’Connor and Magolda, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Pfaller, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Rappaport, 1999.

and often occur at special places as well'. This makes it possible for ritual performance to be more or less stable in time and more or less 'geographically invariant'.<sup>17</sup>

We think that this definition of the ritual form fits strikingly well with the definition of schoolified education presented in the previous section. The fixed curricula, compulsory and carefully monitored attendance, and the fact that the activities are 'guided' and leave little room for choice, make their form clearly determined by people other than the participants themselves.

These aspects of schoolified education could equally well have been analysed in terms of *bureaucracy*, drawing for instance on David Graeber, or in terms of *technology*, as done by Jacques Ellul.<sup>18</sup> It would thus be far from original only to note that modern education to some extent functions as a numb and meaningless social machinery, producing its effects independently of the thoughts, opinions, judgments and feelings of its participants. What needs to be added to this description however, and what makes the concept of ritual more promising than the concepts of bureaucracy or technology as a tool for analysing schoolified education, is that such education is connected to a fixed 'message'.<sup>19</sup>

This message takes the form of a promise that a transformation in terms of knowledge will occur on behalf of the participants. In the definition of schoolified education, this transformation is mentioned in terms of canonised, 'school' knowledge. The many examinations are set up to check whether or not the students have acquired this knowledge.<sup>20</sup> What makes schoolified education, and in particular the teacher education in Gothenburg, fit with the concept or ritual is that the promised transformation is to some degree a matter of fantasy.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 23–50.

<sup>18</sup> Graeber, 2015; Ellul, 1964.

<sup>19</sup> This is the term used by Rappaport, 1999: 69ff.

<sup>20</sup> Kühl, 2011.

Let us illustrate this with reference to the learning outcomes of *Learning, development and didactics 1*, mentioned in the introductory example. According to the formal syllabus, it is expected that students who pass this course:

- can give an account of fundamental perspectives on learning
- can give an account of fundamental questions of developmental psychology for the age of youth
- can give an account of fundamental traditions of didactics and subject didactics
- in a problematising fashion can connect perspectives on learning and traditions of didactics to the activity of schooling and the development of students
- can reflect on how the development of youth is dependent on contextual factors, such as gender, social and cultural factors
- can conduct elementary didactical analyses of teaching situations and take part in constructive arguments pertaining to the fundamental questions of didactics (what, how and why?)

We would like to draw attention to the sharp contrast between these explicitly stated outcomes of a process of learning, and the nature of learning occurring outside of any institutionalised setting. In an informal setting, one might hardly notice when learning takes place, and even less be able to explicitly articulate exactly what was learnt.<sup>21</sup> This is apparently possible in the school context. However, these explicitly articulated learning outcomes are vague, in the sense that it is unclear what is meant, for instance, by being able to ‘give an account of fundamental perspectives on learning’. At the same time, it is ‘precisely’ such an account that students are expected to be able to produce after having finished the course. The outcomes seem to be precise – i.e. to constitute specific targets to aim for – but if you reflect on them critically, you realise that they are vague and superficial. Putting

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<sup>21</sup> E.g., Hutchins, 1996.

it bluntly, we contend that the promise that students who pass *Learning, development and didactics 1* actually attain these learning outcomes, is of the same nature as the promise, in relation to baptism, that the baptised person becomes ‘delivered from sin, death, and the Devil’, as was formulated by Luther in 1529.<sup>22</sup>

Our interpretation of schoolified education as a ritual is further supported by the fact that the explicit outcomes are connected to a corresponding figurativeness of activity. Learning activities take a form that makes it obvious what kind of learning they purportedly lead to.<sup>23</sup> For instance, if the goal of the learning activity is to make students critical, they are directed to act *as if* they were critical. This can be illustrated by the following extract from a course guide (for a course in *Educational Leadership*):

Choose 3-5 concepts that are relevant to your analysis. To support you, you have a ‘list of concepts’ (see the documents on the course website). The list covers the concepts that have been employed in the course literature and in the course seminars, see the last page [of this course guide]. Discuss your understanding of the concepts. Why have you chosen these concepts? Argue for their pros and cons. Remember to argue critically – with the help of the course literature. Relate to the learning outcomes of the course.

Students are instructed to ‘argue critically’, and their success in doing so is supposedly ensured by the detailed instructions of the course guide – in conjunction with an assessment that conforms with these instructions. But the activity in fact only mimics critique; it creates a superficial impression of critique actually taking place. Like actors, the participants make it obvious what it is that they ‘do’, while at the same time it is far from clear that a critical discussion actually takes place – at least not in any ordinary sense of the word.

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted from ‘Baptism’ in English Wikipedia, accessed 2018-06-15. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baptism>.

<sup>23</sup> Lundin, 2012; Lundin and Christensen, 2017.

What goes on here can be clarified with Rappaport's concept of *enactment of meaning*.<sup>24</sup> Let us explain how this concept works. If I am polite and say 'how are you?' to somebody, I act as if I cared about how this person feels. This suggests that I indeed do care about how they feel. In fact, however, when people act politely, they are just following a predetermined script for polite behaviour, which in our culture includes the exchange of certain phrases. While doing this, I may feel just about anything about the other person, for instance nothing at all. The point of the concept of enactment of meaning is that the polite *act* is suggestive of the meaning of care, even though those who perform it do not usually commit to, i.e. 'feel' any care, personally, but perform the actions more or less mechanically. The act actualises the enacted meaning by translating it into audible, visible and tangible signs. In the terminology of Rappaport, the meaning (in this case of care) is transmitted as a message of the enactment.<sup>25</sup>

We suggest that the learning activity about critique should be interpreted in this way, as being suggestive of critique taking place. In the learning activity, participants and possible observers, see critique taking place with their own eyes, and it does not matter that it is perhaps only in the form of superficial acting. Critique is recognised, in the same way as caring is recognised in politeness. The only thing that you need to do, for this to work, so to speak, is not reflect too much upon what happens.

The form of learning activities in schoolified education, which regulates in detail the behaviour of teachers and students, seems to originate in the intention to teach and to learn, in the same way as the 'how do you do?' seems to be based on, or caused by, a desire to find out how it is going with some other person. But

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<sup>24</sup> Rappaport, 1999. pp. 107ff.

<sup>25</sup> Rappaport, 1999, pp. 69ff.

in actual fact, it does not matter what the participants of schoolified education think, feel and desire. They are not the authors of this activity and it is not caused by their personal intentions. Their activity is set in motion and kept on track by external measures – rules, curricula, guides, rewards and sanctions – to create a machine-like ‘show’ of something taking place, which is teaching and learning.

While it seems to be the case that schoolified education would lead to its explicitly articulated learning outcomes, whether or not they were thus explicitly articulated, we contend that *if the learning outcomes were not written down, it would be quite unclear what the activity of teachers and students were supposed to be good for*. In our interpretation, the formal learning outcomes should be understood as a support for interpretation. They clarify what the activity is all about. Rappaport calls statements of this type *factives*.<sup>26</sup> They purport to be describing something, but actually make the world correspond to their description. Thus, the learning outcomes quoted above actually define what students officially ‘can do’ as a result of having passed *Learning, development and didactics 1*.

Given this interpretation, the machinery of our teacher education programme can be understood as establishing an officially sanctioned normative framework for the teaching profession, stating *who* needs to have *what* competences, for *which* particular purpose (to paraphrase yet again the educational idea programme of the University of Gothenburg). Contrary to just describing what teachers actually need to exercise their profession, the teacher education posits the knowledge and the competences of its learning outcomes as necessary. At the same time, as students pass through this education, and attain these outcomes, it is demonstrated that they conform to this normative

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<sup>26</sup> Rappaport, 1999, p. 115.



framework, i.e. that they ‘have what it takes’ to work as teachers.<sup>27</sup>

As a consequence of the figurativeness of learning activities, students are informed about what they are doing, and what this activity purportedly does to them. Rather than actually being able to do the many things described in the learning outcomes in any ordinary sense of the word, they learn *that* they supposedly learn, and indeed also *what* it is that they supposedly learn. In our terminology: students having passed through our teacher education programme have been informed of the meaning of this accomplishment by their own ritual performance, viz. that they indeed have become teachers, as well as what this role implies in terms of knowledge and competence. The transparency of the teacher education programme also makes this clear for outside observers. One could say that students in schoolified education are *objectively* learning, independently of how they happen to engage with, interpret and react ‘personally’ to their own activity.<sup>28</sup>

As is characteristic of rituals, schoolified education is thus much more effective for the production of appearance than for the production of real effects. While it is certainly possible to take sincere interest in another person, while at the same time being polite, the formal scripts of politeness function as a means for emancipation from the burden of always being sincere in this way. Similarly, rather than working for more authentic and thus effective engagement with subject matter, the formalisation of education described above opens up for decoupling, between superficial appearance produced through acts and utterances, and what actually takes place on the inside of students and teachers.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> What we argue here is basically that schoolified education is self-referential, as has been argued previously by for instance Luhmann, 2002.

<sup>28</sup> Slavoj Žižek, 1989, p. 32.

<sup>29</sup> For the concept of ‘decoupling’, see Meyer & Rowan, 1977.

As we discussed in the introduction, we do not want to associate the participating in ritual with irrationality. On the other hand, we do not want to call it rational either. What we do think is that participants of schoolified education are usually in some sense aware of the fact that what they are doing is, at least to some extent, not for real. It is the task of the next section to explain more specifically what such awareness amounts to.

## Taking a stance

Obviously, education is not intended to be productive only of appearances. Quite on the contrary, it is central to the official interpretation of schoolified education that it is ‘for real’. Teacher education is supposed to be authentic and effective; Learning is taken to be dependent on serious engagement on behalf of the students and the resulting knowledge and competence are intended to be efficacious. These expectations run contrary to the ritual-theoretical interpretation above.

Most anthropologists today agree that participants in ritual typically know the difference between the kind of formal, symbolic, i.e. ‘fake’, efficacy that ritual performance results in, and the need to ‘get down to business’ if they want to actually get food, kill their enemies, and so on. However, modern schooling is emphatically proclaimed not to be a ritual and it is thus not surprising that participants of this activity take themselves to be doing something distinctly different from their non-modern predecessors and contemporary religious and superstitious ‘others’. Moderns insist that their education results in really efficacious knowledge, even though they also, like ‘normal’ participants of ritual, see that it is ‘only play’. This paradoxical feature of schoolified education presents itself as a riddle, or a challenge, to participants and observers alike.

We will analyse in some detail two distinct *stances* towards this challenge. Following the Austrian philosopher Robert Pfaller, we

will call these the stance of *belief* and the stance of *faith*, respectively.<sup>30</sup> Two things need to be clarified before we commence with that analysis. Firstly, our use of these two terms differ significantly from how they are normally used. For instance, we will say that a parent who makes arrangements so that some friend dresses up as Santa-Claus at Christmas to give presents to his or her children *believes* in Santa-Claus, even though he or she of course does not believe in Santa Claus in the ordinary sense of the word. Belief, in our usage, is connected to the acceptance of a cultural institution. *Faith*, by contrast, is what the parent in our examples does not have. Faith, in brief, in our usage is a belief that you stand for. A good example of something that people may have faith in is science, some political party or, returning to the topic of this article, education. Secondly, even though we will talk about ‘believers’ and ‘faithful’, we do not intend to mean that people are fixed in their stance, as having either belief or faith. On the contrary, as we will come to in the last section of the article, we take it to be typical of participants of schoolified education to vacillate between belief and faith. The analysis below thus pertains to stances, not persons.

To explain the concept of belief, let us start by noting the presence in everyday life of various kinds of *fictions*. Some are obvious: Everybody knows that Santa Claus ‘does not exist’, even though we pretend that he exists and comes at Christmas to deliver presents to children. There are however also fictions that tend to escape our attention, the presence of which are disclosed only by how they influence behaviour. Think of how people sometimes talk to objects that cause frustration, such as a computer that does not work, or a car that does not start. Such talking (or shouting) would be inexplicable if it was not assumed that the talking or shouting person entertained a belief (remember, in our technical sense of the term) in the fiction that

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<sup>30</sup> The distinction between belief and faith is developed in Pfaller, 2014.

objects could understand what was said to them, and perhaps even as a result feel shame and improve their behaviour.<sup>31</sup>

Characteristic of the stance of belief is that fictions are allowed to ‘do their job’: Santa Claus is allowed to deliver his presents; talking to inanimate objects is allowed to serve as a source of comfort and relief. Belief is a combination of knowledge and unawareness, or perhaps, to be more precise, a combination of knowledge and disregard for, or denial of, knowledge.<sup>32</sup>

It is important for understanding our assessment of the stance of belief that this friendly attitude towards fictions makes them into useful cultural resources. Politeness can only fulfil its function of facilitating the potentially awkward moments of meeting and departing insofar as the fiction that the utterances are authentic is accepted. The same goes for Santa Claus, who can only contribute to the realisation of Christmas to the extent that he is allowed to come. As for schoolified education, participants taking the stance of belief accept that learning takes place, to the benefit of both teachers and students; they ‘let the knowledge come’, one could say, and as a consequence, students can move on towards their exam and teachers can go home satisfied with having done a good job.

A strong incentive for residing in the state of belief is that it can be both practical and pleasurable. You avoid facing up to complicated questions of truth and coherence, and allow yourself to, for instance, learn super many things incredibly quickly, even as you relax and chat with friends while doing it. As a teacher you can imagine yourself to be brilliant as you grade 10 assignments in an hour; Santa Claus can come, and, borrowing yet another example from Pfaller, you can allow yourself to be absorbed by the atmosphere created by drinking an expensive wine.<sup>33</sup> The drawback, however, connected to the stance of

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Pfaller, 2014, pp. 2f.

<sup>32</sup> Žižek, 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Pfaller, 2011, pp. 42, 176, 223.

belief, is that these pleasures come with a certain shame, at least if you want to consider yourself to be rational and efficient. What kind of person is it, really, that glides through teacher education, or accepts his pay as a university employee, without reacting, forcefully, to falseness and deception?

The faithful does not want to be such a person.

A first crucial difference between the stance of belief and the stance of faith is that the faithful person is personally committed to his standpoint; it has, for him, the status of a conclusion reached through critical reflection. While the stance of belief comes with a certain shame, the stance of faith is connected to pride. The faithful person is proud to have come to his conclusion, which he finds rational and coherent. In the case of schoolified education, we take this conclusion to be that *it does not work, but that it could work if only it was done properly*.

Belief amounts to a distanced and pragmatic relationship to education that actually exists. Faith, by contrast, amounts to a close and committed relationship to the concept or idea that actually existing education appears to be trying to realise. This concept or idea is typically associated with science. So, when the stance of belief entails pragmatic acceptance of education as it actually is (enactment, performance), faith entails an attachment to the scientific idea (i.e. the enacted meaning) that education is purportedly based on.

What is crucial here is the slight difference between recognising an intended meaning, i.e. recognising what it is that is enacted in the performance, and recognising this meaning to actually be there, in the activity. In the first case, the meaning is, so to speak, *displaced*. It resides at a certain distance from the participants in the activity. This is how education appears to believers. It is obvious what the activity is ‘meant to be’, but it is equally obvious that it ‘does not work’. What people taking the stance of faith do is to assume, from the fact of the (displaced) presence of this meaning, that it is possible to arrange an activity that has this

meaning, so to speak, *in it*; they assume that it is possible to arrange a type of education – that *they* would certainly not call ‘schoolified’ – where students actually attain their learning outcomes, because they engage with their learning activities authentically.

Instead of only recognizing the gap between an actually existing activity and its purported meaning, they switch places between activity and meaning, and give priority to the second term. For them, the meaning is more present than the activity. They take this meaning to be ‘what’s real’ and needs to be taken seriously. Thus, as a consequence, they contend that practice – reality – *needs to change*.

The central point here is not that faith comes with a zeal for reform, *but that the direction of this reform is given by the ritual performance*. The ideal with which the faithful identifies is made present through enactment. According to the faithful person, instead of being productive mainly of appearance, the activity should be authentic, doing what it is supposed to be doing.<sup>34</sup> It is thus the activity of schoolified education that makes the faithful person convinced of the importance of what is articulated in its learning outcomes.

## Taking action

From the perspective of faith, the gap between appearance and reality, typical of rituals and typical of schoolified education, seems to be caused by a combination of epistemological and moral deficiency on behalf of (other) performers: they do not seem to understand how learning works, they do not understand how to transform theoretical knowledge about learning into concrete teaching and learning activities. Insofar as they do know, they seem to shy away from the hard work implied by their own understanding.

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<sup>34</sup> This point is also argued in Pfaller, 2014.

The method of faith to compensate for these deficiencies is *articulation*. In general, this amounts to a clarification of the relationship between the various components of education, from its theoretical foundation in theories of learning to the appropriate design of learning activities and assessments of knowledge. It also includes the formulation of guidelines for participants that help them understand *what* they are expected to do, *how* they are expected to do it, *when* they are expected to do different things and *why* they are expected to do these things, in order to make them feel secure and thus help them engage with the learning process in full – despite their epistemological and moral deficiencies (paraphrasing again the educational idea programme of the University of Gothenburg). It is only natural that these measures of improvement tend to prevent participants from using their own judgment, as the problem to be solved is taken (by the seemingly faithful policymakers) to be caused by a deficiency of this judgment (of believers).

Returning to our discussion of ritual above, one should note that the installations of the faithful work simultaneously on two levels. Rules and regulation, and assessments connected to rewards and sanctions constitute a tightened ritual form, which could also be called (as we mentioned at the beginning of this paper) bureaucracy or technology, functioning like numb machinery in regulating the behaviour of participants. This tightening of form, at the same time, translates into a strengthening of the message of schoolified education; it makes the message more persuasive, more intrusive, a stronger power to be reckoned with. Interestingly, the faithful can be seen here as employing their full capacity of critical reflection, for the purpose of controlling not only the behaviour, but also the thoughts, feelings and attitudes of their fellow participants. Insofar as they are participants themselves, they also of course become subject themselves, to their own regulation. Faithful agents of reform understand themselves as working for emancipation from error and laziness, as working for the greater good – in our particular

example, the greater good of the teaching profession, but more generally of society. But insofar as they think along the lines of schoolified education, insofar as they identify with schoolified education symbolically, with the message of their own ritual performance, their enthusiasm for change translates into a tightening of the grip of the order already present.<sup>35</sup>

Let us now turn to the stance of belief. To explain what participants taking the stance of belief do, besides simply complying, when faced with the normative framework of schoolified education, tight and annoying, as it has been made, by acts of faith, we introduce the concept of *the naïve observer*.<sup>36</sup>

The naïve observer can be described as a (hypothetical) psychological entity similar to the ‘super-ego’ invented by Sigmund Freud. But while the super-ego judges us based on our innermost desires and intentions, the naïve observer judges us from a distinctly *naïve* perspective and based only on outward, superficial appearance. For better or worse, the naïve observer always takes what seems to be the case to actually be the case. In fact, when we are judged by our naïve observer, we can easily recognise the superficiality of his judgment. This does not, however, diminish his power over us. The concept of the naïve observer is designed to highlight that we seem in some cases to be subjected to a very stupid logic, even though we are able to recognise its stupidity.

What does this logic consist in? The naïve observer ‘learns’, so to speak, about how things work in the world, what’s good and bad, by observing what people do – attending only to surface appearances, accepting them at face value. This means that, from taking part in schoolified education (one can think of it as sitting on the shoulders of participants), he ‘learns’ that participation in learning activities results in real knowledge, and that students

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<sup>35</sup> The concept of ‘symbolic identification’ is explained in Žižek, 1989: 116 et passim.

<sup>36</sup> Pfaller, 2014, pp. 231ff.



actually can do what is described in the learning outcomes of the courses that they pass. This learning can be understood as a peculiar form of internalisation of a normative framework. We cannot avoid being subjected to it – even though we recognise its contingent and superficial nature. Taking the stance of belief amounts to handing over control to the naïve observer, acting so to speak on auto-pilot. One can think here of Heidegger’s characterisation of *the They*, that ‘see, and judge [...] the way they see and judge’, that ‘prescribes the kind of being of everydayness’.<sup>37</sup>

To explain the point of the concept of the naïve observer, let us consider an academic, who identifies with that part of the normative framework of academia that says that intellectuals love to read books, in particular classics, and in particular in their original language.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, however, just like participants of schoolified education do not care so much personally about its many learning outcomes, this academic does not care so much personally about these classics. What she then might end up doing, is to search for classics, on obscure and only semi-legal websites, and download them to her computer. She finds such browsing and downloading quite satisfying, and the reason for this, in our interpretation, is that the naïve observer confuses it with academic work, with actual reading.

Another useful example is the tourist, whose naïve observer has picked up on the idea that a number of ‘sights’, such as the Eiffel tower, are so immensely interesting that they are worth travelling to.<sup>39</sup> In the same way as the interest of our reading-evasive academic is not personal, the tourist has no authentic interest in these sights. This becomes evident by the fact that, when he arrives at his sight, he hardly looks at it, but instead immediately takes out his camera to take photographs, not of the sight itself, but of himself ‘being there’, and posts them on Facebook and

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<sup>37</sup> Heidegger, 2010: §27, p. 123.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Pfaller, 2014, p. 28.

<sup>39</sup> Pfaller, 2014, p. 115.

Instagram. In this example, the camera fulfils the same function as the click on an icon did for our academic; it is part of a show for the naïve observer, who confuses the superficial operation of this technological artefact with an authentic act that this operation signifies.

Both of these acts, the downloading of books and the photographing of sights, constitute *miniaturisations* of some more elaborate and time-consuming act that they signify. By means of these miniaturisations, the academic can hide from herself the fact that she is not really interested in reading classics, and the tourist can hide from himself that he could not care less about the Eiffel tower. Since they hide these personal sentiments, which run contrary to the common sense of the culture of which they are part, that is, from the naïve observer, they can feel satisfied with themselves. The academic feels as if she had actually read and been a ‘good intellectual’; the tourist feels the pleasure of having seen something immensely interesting, even though he does not actually have any such interest and has seen almost nothing.

The roles played by the computer and the camera in these examples should be noted. In our interpretation, they help the naïve observer understand what supposedly takes place; the naïve observer confounds the digital transfer of the books into the computer with the reading of the lazy academic, and he confounds the ‘seeing’ of the camera with the sightseeing of the tourist. Following Pfaller, we talk about this in terms of *delegation*.<sup>40</sup> The reading that the academic wants to avoid is *delegated* to the computer; the seeing that the tourist prefers not to be bothered with, is *delegated* to the camera. We suggest that miniaturisation, and its special form delegation, can be called methods of *norm evasion*.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 15 et passim.

<sup>41</sup> While the concepts of miniaturisation and delegation are taken from Pfaller, the concept of norm evasion is our own invention. In general, while our analysis is heavily indebted to Pfaller, our object of study,

Armed with these new concepts (miniaturisation, delegation, norm evasion), let us come back to our schoolified education. In the analysis above, we have argued that the performance of schoolified education is productive of a normative framework, which is internalised by its participants so that they cannot but be regulated by it, albeit in a peculiar and naïve way. What can now be added is that this performance, strangely enough, also fills the totally opposite function for participants, of evading the obligation to comply with this normative framework. The general idea here is that moderns, just like members of any culture, are subjected to a set of norms that constitute a ‘symbolic order’ of modernity. This order not only prescribes what is good and bad, but also what is to be considered impure and contemptuous and what kind of activities are to be experienced as pleasurable. That academics should find pleasure in reading classics is part of this order, as well as the idea that the Eiffel tower is an interesting ‘sight’.

A sample of modern norms can be found in the policy documents of the Bologna process, as accounted for in the introduction of this paper. Moderns should thus be knowledgeable, flexible, employable and democratic. Teachers, more specifically, have their normative framework nicely articulated in the learning outcomes of teacher education.

The somewhat counterintuitive, alternative interpretation that we want to convey here is that these articulations, together with their figurative activities, fulfil the function of showing compliance with various aspects of the normative framework of modern society, in a way that is generally seen through, but accepted at face value by the naïve observer. The performance of these activities therefore results in relief from the pressure to conform and satisfaction, in the same way as such satisfaction is

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schoolified education, causes us to use his concepts differently from how he uses them himself. Readers interested in the theoretical foundation of our analysis are referred to Pfaller, 2014 and Rappaport, 1999.

derived from buying books on the Internet and from taking photographs of sights.

The whole machinery of schoolified education can thus, surprisingly, be interpreted as a form of resistance, to the very same norms that it transmits as a message.

More specifically, we suggest that the performance of schoolified education can be understood as a defence against a dangerous possibility inherent in its own message, in the meaning of its enactment. The performance of schoolified education keeps this message alive, in the form of a normative framework with which everybody has to comply, but at the same time keeps it at bay, insofar as such compliance is only required at the time and place of ritual performance, i.e. at the time and place of education. Nobody outside the school asks for verification that we actually have the knowledge indicated by the learning outcomes of the courses we have passed. Nor do we have to act according to such knowledge. All such 'work' is performed within the confines of ritual.

An important consequence of this line of reasoning is that the efforts of the faithful, to clarify how schoolified education is supposed to function, no longer appear as attempts at real change, but as messages, directed at the naïve observer to help him understand what the activity of schoolified education is actually about. Because it is only through the explicit formulation of learning outcomes, and through the figurativeness of learning activities, that the naïve observer understands, not only what it is that the students actually do, but also what this activity purportedly results in.

Strangely enough then, the very machinery of regulation and evaluation that constitutes schoolified education as a ritual, can be understood as a device of deception, as an object of delegation. What is demanded according to the norms of modernity is conscious reflection, intelligence, awareness of what actually goes

on, and adaption of behaviour to ‘the voice of reason’. What is the machinery of schoolified education, if not a materialised, externalised, automated form of this voice, that guarantees adaption by means of coercion? Instead of having to reflect themselves, participants can lazily rely on being regulated and supervised; instead of having to argue with peers, they can rely on the persuasiveness of coercion. Cleverly, they have delegated the hard work of controlling their own behaviour, of exercising judgment, of intelligent interpretation, to an automatic mechanism. In the same way as the naïve observer interprets the buying of a book as a great improvement on actually reading – since many more pages seem to be read – this machinery is interpreted as an improvement on fallible personal reflection and judgment, since everybody who has taken the course in ‘critical thinking’ is believed to actually think critically. Thus, unsurprisingly, working on the construction of this machinery, is interpreted by the naïve observer as doing something much more useful, than teaching – and is rewarded accordingly.

This means that the distinction between faith and belief might not be as clear cut as we have suggested above. What seems to be a stance of faith, the activity of participants supposedly having faith, can equally well be interpreted as a show for the naïve observer – as a show of being faithful and authentic, of taking efficiency seriously – because this is part of what is being asked for in the message of schoolified education. This means that research and reform, and critical discourse generally, can also be produced out of a stance of careless forgetfulness of the distinction between fact and fiction, out of laziness and complicity – the exact opposite of the produced appearance of courageous rejection of doxa based on critical reflexivity.

## Discussion

Schoolified education can be understood as a *compromise formation*: On the one hand, it amounts to the recognition and reproduction of a set of norms and values, a certain doxa. As

regards our example of teacher education, its schoolified form helps to establish the meaning of being a competent, professional teacher, while at the same time showing how individual students become such teachers. Schoolified education thus contributes to the reproduction of a certain order. On the other hand, because schoolified education is all about appearance, it retains certain scope for personal thoughts, feelings and desires, within this order. Insofar as its ritualised procedures can be performed mechanically, superficially, and insofar as they constitute miniaturisations, perhaps utilising the technique of delegation, they constitute a form of resistance to order, because these procedures make it easier to conform than it seems to be, officially, publicly. For instance, insofar as superficial appearances are accepted, it is possible to become a certified teacher supposedly having a very large amount of knowledge and very many competences, rather quickly, without much effort.

In some countries, the ‘bolognisation’ of the university has been discussed critically, and has even met resistance.<sup>42</sup> Based on the analysis presented above, we interpret the comparatively harmonious integration of the Bologna protocol into the Swedish system of higher education as a consequence of the emphasis in Sweden on the value of equity and inclusivity. The ritualisation that the implementation of the Bologna protocol leads to seemingly facilitates the simultaneous realisation of high standards of knowledge and the realisation of these values. By functioning as a ritual, teacher education in Sweden makes it seem as if almost everybody can become a teacher, at the same time as all such teachers have a very large number of great competencies. Insofar as this explanation holds, this means that universities in Sweden are characterised by a belief-type mind-set, viz. a somewhat relaxed attitude towards cognitive dissonance, at least more so than universities in countries where Bologna-style ritualisation has been resisted.

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<sup>42</sup> Pongratz 2009; Horst, 2010.

As should be clear from the analysis above, our main point is not to pass judgment on this mind-set. On the contrary, we wish to bring into view the preconditions for the critique that is perennially directed at activities governed by belief in modern society, not least, of course, activities of education and research.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, if it is indeed the case that the emphasis placed on the values of inclusivity and equity in Sweden leads to ritualisation, this merits further study.

When belief is dissolved by faith, critical voices are raised and processes of reform are set in motion. In a nutshell, this is our explanation of the form of schoolified higher education and more generally of school itself: critique of superficiality and contradictions leads to articulation of everything from the subject matter studied to what students (and teachers) should do when and for what purpose. The mind-set of faith demands that all pieces of education fit neatly together, constituting a rational system, and that the participants do what is expected of them, and nothing else.

As a final remark, we would like to draw attention to how this explanation of the dynamics of formalisation within the sphere of education differs from accounts that see ‘the market’ and New Public Management as the main drivers of the recent transformation of the university.<sup>44</sup> While we do not wish to deny the increasing influence of economic concerns in education, which for instance have led to the introduction of ‘employability’ as a central goal, we instead put focus on how the zeal for improvement among well intended researchers and politicians *who do not care for the market*, nonetheless actually contributes to trends that they most probably rather wish to prevent. Our analysis moves beyond the simple opposition between us and them, where supposedly ignorant supporters of neoliberalism are blamed for the ills of education. By drawing attention to how

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Lundin, 2012.

<sup>44</sup> Lindström & Beach, 2015; Agnafors, 2017.

education functions as a ritual, and as such constitutes a compromise formation, we wish to open up for a more nuanced discussion of how the detrimental aspects of present-day practices can perhaps be mitigated and reforms can be implemented that so to speak *improve the compromise*, rather than making matters even worse.

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## Resentment, Disappointment and the Ceaseless Vitality of Teachers and Pedagogy – an Essay

*Moira von Wright*

**I**n *Exploring the Moral Heart of Teaching*, the American educationist David T. Hansen writes that educational inquiry continually returns to the same kinds of questions and concerns, albeit in different manifestations, and that to ‘those who dream of a last word or of final insight into such questions, this state of affairs can feel frustrating or even maddening’<sup>1</sup>. Hansen thereby points at an important aspect of education: the negative impression it tends to have in certain areas. For a teacher who loves one’s work and is interested in developing both morally and professionally, it is difficult to grasp or accept the anger and resentment that education awakens among different people. It took me many years to understand why education provokes such emotions, and why the Swedish academic setting, more than other such settings in the Nordic countries, is so aggressive towards education in general and the academic discipline of education in particular (sv. pedagogik)<sup>2</sup>. In addition to being the name of a scientific field, the Swedish term pedagogik describes the art and practice of educating, teaching and learning, and human flourishing – and reflection upon these issues. In this

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<sup>1</sup> Hansen, 2001, p. xi.

<sup>2</sup> For a thorough account of the Swedish discipline “pedagogik”, see Nilsson Sjöberg, ed., 2018a.

essay I distinguish between education on the one hand, which designates the overall structure, organisation, policy, history and culture of education and the research on these questions, including pedagogy, and pedagogy on the other hand, which encircles both the practice of and the research on the very acts and situations where teaching and learning, upbringing and self-formation occur. Research in pedagogy is thus often developed in relation to teacher education and the upbringing and education of children and young people. Max van Manen provides a clue to this meaning of the word:

The simple point is this: it is pedagogy that makes a crucial difference in a child's life. Pedagogy involves us in distinguishing actively and/or reflectively what is good, life enhancing, and supportive from what is not good or damaging in the ways that we act, live, and deal with children.<sup>3</sup>

Taking as my starting point the insight from Hansen that the last word about education cannot be said, and that this can be infuriating for some, I will develop a discussion about the 'bashing', or attacking, of the field of education at large, and research(ers) in pedagogy in particular, with brief instances from my own life – or, as some might prefer to say, with the input of anecdotal evidence. I will start at the beginning: namely, the year in which I arrived in Sweden.

## **Teachers and researchers in pedagogy under attack**

Today, twenty-five years later, I still have vivid memories of my first year in Stockholm, when I proudly told people that I was a Finnish primary school teacher. I had been a classroom teacher for around twelve years by that time, and I was not prepared to be questioned about my choice of work or my ability to do it, and even less to be mauled by strangers who knew nothing about me or about schools from a professional point of view. In my home country the teacher had a socially and professionally respected position and naively I took it for granted that this would be the case in the neighbouring country Sweden too, considering our

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<sup>3</sup> van Manen, 2012, p. 10.

common history and similar societies.<sup>4</sup> I particularly remember a confrontation with a hairdresser in the spring of 1993, during my first visit to that hair salon. She was new to me, I was new to her, and she was keen to find subjects to chat about and to get to know me. We talked about the weather, different kinds of haircuts, pets and many other things. We were building a relationship. She had a steady professional grip, and I felt secure in her hands. However, within a few minutes, the situation had changed totally; I wanted to escape, but obviously could not. What had happened? We had started talking about teachers and schools.

‘What work do you do?’ the hairdresser asked me. ‘I am a teacher’, I answered. ‘School is terrible’, she quickly replied. I noticed that she had become upset. I felt her grip around my neck tighten, and I sensed the edge of the scissors on my skin. Violently, she pulled my hair and said: ‘Teachers nowadays do not do their work, they are simply no good. There is no discipline in the schools, the kids can behave any way they want, and they don’t learn anything. I think that teachers must...’ The hairdresser went on talking about what was wrong with the teachers and with the schools, and suggesting how things should actually be handled and what the teachers should do. I began to feel increasingly uncomfortable. At first, I tried to explain what teaching is, describe the subtlety of teachers’ work and defend the public school; however, it was like throwing fuel on a fire. Eventually, I stopped answering her questions with anything other than a mumble, and just sat there wishing that the situation would come to an end. When I paid and left, we said a cold goodbye to each other. I did not return. The situation left me confused: hadn’t my neighbour reacted in a similar way when I said that I was a teacher? And the taxi driver...? Why were they so upset about teachers? Although I did not yet fully grasp the pattern, I had learnt a lesson: never tell anybody in Stockholm that you are a teacher, unless you want to be scolded.

I wondered why everybody was so distressed about Swedish schools. Why did so many people seem to dislike teachers? On

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<sup>4</sup> Simola, 2015.

what grounds did they believe that they had the answers to the (alleged) problems? Were they pointing at true problems in the schools, or were they just habitually attacking the education system? Fortunately, I was not turned down by the critical attitudes I encountered towards teachers and schools. I was a newcomer and an immigrant, so I didn't take it personally. On the contrary, I felt a growing interest in the conditions for teaching and learning, which triggered questions about the work of teachers and pedagogical relations that I had already considered during my time as a student and young teacher. It also roused new questions, such as how these problems could be framed and understood. The emotional turmoil I met made me curious about contemporary research in the field of education; I found a lot of interesting scientific work in that field in the library of the Stockholm Institute of Education, which was within walking distance of my new home. Ultimately, I decided to put aside my plan to write a thesis in history, and instead to become a researcher in the field of education – in questions concerning pedagogy. Little did I know that I was stepping onto a path where my words and actions might be read and appreciated by students and teachers from 'within', but would be deliberately misread and attacked by researchers from the 'outside'.

This essay mainly evolves around the critique against the discipline of education that comes from parts of the Swedish scientific community. First, however, the link between scientific critique and public frustration concerning schools and education at large should be mentioned. For example, this link can be seen in the media, where academics fish for sympathy for their points of view by picking on colleagues or scientific perspectives that, from their perspective, threaten the ideology that they represent. An unprovoked attack on me in one of the biggest Swedish newspapers a few years ago can serve as an example<sup>5</sup>. This newspaper article condemned me – a professor, vice chancellor and “pedagogue” – for spreading ‘heresy’, and demanded that I should be instantly stopped in my tracks. The tone of the piece implied that the false doctrines of pedagogues (researchers in

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<sup>5</sup> Ingvar, Sturmark and Wikforss, 2015.



pedagogy) were dangerously spilling over into schools. Pluralism, postmodernism, feminism and social constructivism etc. were attacked as anti-intellectual, and as equally leading to relativism and to the denial of historical and scientific facts. My mail was immediately overloaded by messages from unknown people who saw an opportunity to join the mob and hate (me). They wrote things such as ‘shame on you, you bitch’, and ‘...it’s your fault...’. Surprised colleagues who knew my work and knew that I was working within quite different theoretical perspectives than those that had been insinuated in the newspaper, asked me if I should not defend myself publicly. At that time, however, I refrained. Although I might have expected a fair and argumentative treatment from other academics, albeit from other sciences and viewpoints than my own, I felt that the critique was built on deceptive fabrications and accusations, and on ill-theorized understandings of postmodernism – a hopeless starting point for any sort of discussion. This was an attack against pluralism and critical thinking, and it included a deliberate misreading of the critical problematization of values in school subjects. Even though I did not actually speak from the acclaimed ‘postmodern’ position that they attacked, it would have been unjust towards my colleagues, who seriously develop research from those perspectives, to make a point of saying so. In hindsight, however, I regret not answering to the debate. Few academic voices publicly defend the research field of education and the need for critical thinking, which gives the impression that there is no strength in it – and a projected weakness tends to invite further aggression.

Looking back, I can see that this attack on researchers in pedagogy, which was to be followed by many similar attacks, came from a small group in the scientific community. The attack was part and parcel of a larger movement of critique from scientism and secular humanism against the humanities, the ‘soft’ sciences. The word scientism describes a position in which one believes that only a certain kind of scientific knowledge is true; as David E. Cooper puts it, ‘the conviction that only natural sciences provide genuine understanding of the world and life’<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Cooper, 2018, p. 118.

Furthermore, criticism and disapproval of pedagogues and pedagogy (in this case, of me and my work) can be seen as an indirect way to obstruct and silence the revolutionary potential of education. The strategy to exclude citizens from the realm of higher education and critical discourse is still a way of maintaining the status quo of society<sup>7</sup>. Interestingly, in totalitarian societies, academics are silenced by rulers and politicians because of the revolutionary potential of critical discourse; in Sweden, the work of silencing seems to be taken over by the academics themselves. I will come back to this point; first, however, I will take a deeper look at the question of how disappointments play into this situation.

## Public disappointment

Let me now briefly return to the hairdresser, and her frustration with teachers. At first, I felt personally confronted by her. I then realized that there was more to her response than a personal attack. She was upset about the younger generation, which does not live up to the expectations of the older generation, and she concluded that the fault must lie with teachers and schools. In retrospect, when I listen more carefully, I also hear annoyance and distress in her voice. She was disappointed because the school did not give children what they needed, and because the children did not turn out as she expected. Her expectation that education would effectively advance the young ones and build a better society in accordance with the plans of the older generation had not been fulfilled. My hairdresser was expressing a concern that is well-known from history: the disappointment of the older generation about the state of the younger generation, and the worry that society will lose its moral foundation.

Public disappointment in education is widespread, and is reflected in politics and in the media. Politicians try to win elections with promises concerning schools and education, although they have few or no ideas about what schooling really ought to provide for each child and citizen. They tend to present argumentations and

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<sup>7</sup> Alm, 2016.

solutions that, from both an academic and a professional point of view, seem populist and superficial; nevertheless, on some levels, the politicians' solutions intersect with professional and academic discussions and interests. The international competition between nations that occurs through Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests<sup>8</sup> is one arena in which political and academic interests seem to merge – or clash. The media adds to public frustration by publishing articles, interviews and columns with a thin content that basically aims at bashing pedagogues. Attacks on pedagogy do not only come from scientism, but also from both populism and idealism, and from their descriptions of 'what is' and their expectations of 'what is not yet'<sup>9</sup>. Both parties overlook the fact that pedagogy happens in the present. Pedagogues take the tendencies of educational relations in consideration in their research; furthermore, classroom life is in many aspects much more complex, diverse and situated than what the goals of (natural) science seem to accept. The bashing of pedagogy is, though, most severe and problematic within the academic arena because it torments pedagogy and so threatens the scientific and critical reflection on teaching and pedagogical relations.

## Forms of frustration

In the professional field of education and in the academic discourse on education, there are at least three different tendencies that signal discontent with the current state of pedagogy; they can be recognised as attitudes, however, they come from rather different points of view.

First there is a positive and hungry attitude, which I have mostly heard from those I call the 'professional frustrates'; these are teachers and teacher educators who reveal interest and expectations, saying: 'We want more!' They want more time to discuss, reflect and develop as teachers; they want more time to

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<sup>8</sup> For information on the PISA tests, see <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/> or <https://www.skolverket.se/>

<sup>9</sup> Biesta and Säfström, 2011.

work together with the students and community, and to deal with the critical questions of our time. Most teachers who work in schools feel an urge to improve their teaching skills, and to know more about pedagogical relations and about how to strengthen their students as learners and as future citizens. They tend to see pedagogy as a field of knowledge that can enhance their own practice, rather than something that will blindly direct their actions and methods.

Within the academic research community, there is a range of critical positions. A strong voice is heard from the ‘antagonists’, who wish to influence teacher education, teaching methods and the curriculum from their own particular perspectives. At best, they are convinced that they can offer better alternatives to education in terms of teaching methodologies than pedagogy can; at worst, they commit discursive violence and public shaming of educational research and pedagogy, as they ride on the back of populism. Disappointment is too weak a word to describe their position; it is more suitable to speak of anger and resentment – and, in many cases, an urge to use the situation to win points and, ultimately, research money. Their attitude towards pedagogy is a condemning one; they state that pedagogy can deliver nothing of value in comparison with (for example) neuropsychiatry and brain science. Among the antagonists, we find an appeal for scientism – the position I described previously. The antagonists have been successful in their efforts to influence politics, including the distribution of research money<sup>10</sup>.

On the other end of the academic spectrum are the ‘discouraged researchers’. They show concern for education at large, but are

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<sup>10</sup> The result of this can for instance be seen in the disappearance of Education (sv. *Pedagogik*) as an independent discipline in the categories of sciences decided by the Swedish Research Council, *Vetenskapsrådet*, where only the vague field of Educational Science (sv. *Utbildningsvetenskap*) contains all kinds of research and positions that deal with educational questions, including “pedagogik”, and correspondingly so in the national list of scientific subjects (sv. *nationell ämneskategori*) in the Swedish *DiVA- Academic Archive Online*.

critical of the development of the field and work hard to change it from within. Their concern can be summarized by the following quotation: ‘Education has developed from being considered the key to well-being of nations and individuals into global and result-oriented competition between nations within an economic logic’<sup>11</sup>. Instrumentality and technicality, together with strong economic interests, are seen as factors that hinder good pedagogy, and alternative perspectives are tested and presented.

Researchers who wish to focus on the potential of education to cultivate intellectual and moral virtues tend to find themselves more or less ruled out from educational discussions. Anders Burman<sup>12</sup> claims that *Bildung* (sv. *bildning*) ought to be one of the most central concepts in education, and complains about the lack of interest in *Bildung* among educational researchers in Sweden. He suggests that the reason might be that education, like so many other disciplines, cut its relations with the German tradition after the Second World War. Another reason could be the fact that the discipline of education in Sweden has advanced in close relation to educational reforms within education at all levels.<sup>13</sup> Burman<sup>14</sup> further argues that certain areas of educational research, such as the history of educational ideas and the traditions of *Bildung*, have been neglected in favour of the Anglo-American scientific tradition. However, within the Anglo-American tradition, we also find deep interest in questions of human flourishing and moral and ethical issues. Within that tradition, however, these questions are mostly framed in discourses other than that of *Bildung*, including the tradition of liberal education – a point that Burman grasps. He asks for more research about and on *Bildung* and cultivation. However, in order to grasp the issues of teaching, human flourishing and cultivation, also research in pedagogy is needed; that is, it needs ongoing inquiry from within pedagogical relations. Teaching is an elusive practice and a never-ending moral endeavour; the final words about teaching cannot and will never

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<sup>11</sup> Olsson, Dahlberg and Theorell, 2015, p. 718.

<sup>12</sup> Burman, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Forsberg and Sundberg, 2018, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Burman, 2018, pp. 9–10.

be said, as Hansen has claimed. Therefore, there must be constantly ongoing and lively inquiry and reflection.

## **The ground-breaking potential of education**

Earlier, I described the questions my hairdresser's aversion to teachers awoke in me. As a teacher, I saw teaching as a dynamic practice supported by reflection and pedagogy. She saw something completely different. She saw wily kids, frustrated parents, a problematic society and so forth. Today, I acknowledge that my hairdresser had good reason to be upset about the status and results of the Swedish school system, at least from the viewpoint of whether school was living up to the promises given by society; she was right to be disappointed, because her expectations were not fulfilled. Like so many others, at some point she had been presented with a glorification of schools and schooling. She was probably unaware of the vast amount of research and text being produced about schools, teaching and education without ever really reaching the field of practice – and even if she was, such research was not her concern. Like the rest of society, she expected wonders from mass education at all levels, from the individual to the national. And when it turns out that schools cannot live up to the expectations, who are the guilty ones? First the teachers, then the structures, then the teacher students, then the researchers...and, among these, the pedagogues!

The irony is that such sturdy critiques are right, in a way, because pedagogues cannot and will not offer a solution to the knowledge competition between nations, just as researchers in economy will not present the final solutions to our economic practices. The pedagogues cannot and will not come up with lessons that are as effective as those in some other countries – unless they totally abandon the idea of education as encouraging freedom and forming future fellow-humans and democratic citizens; and few Swedish teachers see how their work could possibly lend itself to the instrumental and technical effectiveness of schools such as Gymnasium No. 11 in Hangzhou<sup>15</sup>. In this modern Chinese

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<sup>15</sup> Matikainen, 2018.

school, students are constantly followed and recorded by advanced camera systems that recognize each individual student and record every change in their faces and each bodily movement. The camera can see if students are happy or sad, and registers their behaviour. This system is defended by the local Chinese school authorities for making both teaching and learning more effective; since it is also used to identify students in the library and at the cafeteria, it is considered to be of great help in making things run smoothly. Understandably, this method has been questioned, and some describe it as being far beyond the imagination of George Orwell. However, as the method at this school is a planned part in the development of a personal balance for behaviour points for each citizen, its use is likely to spread. From my perspective, the method in use at Gymnasium No. 11 has nothing to do with pedagogy. Instead it is a misuse of what education and schooling can and should offer. Knowing that certain methods make something more effective does not make those methods right or morally defensible. A totalitarian system may offer effective training, but it contradicts human flourishing and education for freedom. A society with meticulous control cannot afford critical discussions or different perspectives, and has no interest in the divergent questions of education. Such a society does not want the messy and obscure discussions that pedagogy can inform.

Pedagogy is not only about schools and children. It also deals with meaning, forming and educating within society at large, throughout the life-span of the citizens. A life-long process of thinking, forming and learning – of *Bildung*, if you like – keeps human beings awake, interested, critically thinking and deliberating. Teaching, along with all education, must be open to reflection and change, making it both a vital part of democratic society and a challenging object for research. Many pedagogues have argued that education must be understood as atemporal, and as being located within the tension between ‘what is’ and ‘what is not’<sup>16</sup>. Here is where different educational relations take form: some speak of a pedagogy of place<sup>17</sup> and others speak of the

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<sup>16</sup> E.g., Biesta and Säfström, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Løvlie, 2007; von Wright, 2011.

encounter as the place where the significant pedagogical relations occur<sup>18</sup>.

Education has ground-breaking potential – both to encourage human flourishing and to switch off the light in the eyes of the learner. Therefore, education needs pedagogy and a vital discussion about its normative implications and its foundations.

## Concluding words

In the summer of 2018, I walked back to the address where I first had my hair cut in Stockholm. The hairdresser was no longer there, so I did not manage to speak to her about her view on teachers, education and pedagogy today. Neither did I have the opportunity to tell her how her bashing of education had inspired me to deepen my pedagogical questions and to work within the research field for much longer than I had planned. Confrontations, as long as they do not hit too hard, can be healthy and awakening. Twenty-five years ago, my hairdresser challenged my thoughts. This does not mean that she was right; however, it may serve as a reminder that we need to encounter each other, listen carefully, respect our differences and keep the discussion going. Even within scientific discourse, we must accept that nobody will have the final word. Maxine Greene's optimistic outlook on education may therefore serve as an ending to this essay: 'And, when freedom is concerned, it is always a time to begin'<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Nilsson Sjöberg, 2018b.

<sup>19</sup> Greene, 1988, p.135.



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