

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.¹

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.² This programme aims for about 200 learning outcomes, distributed over 35 courses. It is compulsory

¹ Information about the Bologna process can be found at ehea.info.

² 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’.³

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

³ 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.⁴ 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’.⁵ 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’.⁶ Another critic of the Bologna

⁴ Such inversion is also the topic of Lundin, 2016.

⁵ Kühl, 2011, p. 2f.

⁶ 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’.⁷

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.⁸

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

⁷ Pfaller, 2011, p. 38, translated by Sverker Lundin.

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

accompanying actions, etc.) for behaviour'.⁹ It was not until the 19th 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.¹⁰ This original meaning was neutral, because it was not assumed, as anthropologists started to do in the 19th century, that the participants were unaware of the fact that they were performing a rite, following a script.

In the 20th century, the alleged irrationality of so-called 'primitive' people became a topic of theoretical debate within anthropology.¹¹ 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.¹² 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.¹³ 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*

⁹ Asad, 1993, p. 58.

¹⁰ See Bell, 1997.

¹¹ See e.g., Rappaport, 1999 and Latour, 1993.

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

¹³ 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’.¹⁴ On the contrary, as we will explain, critical analysis of ritual may actually drive a process of further ritualisation.¹⁵

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’.¹⁶ 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 [...]

¹⁴ Quantz, O’Connor and Magolda, 2011.

¹⁵ Pfaller, 2014.

¹⁶ 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'.¹⁷

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.¹⁸ 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'.¹⁹

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.²⁰ 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.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 23–50.

¹⁸ Graeber, 2015; Ellul, 1964.

¹⁹ This is the term used by Rappaport, 1999: 69ff.

²⁰ 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.²¹ 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

²¹ 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 1529.²²

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.²³ 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.

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

²³ Lundin, 2012; Lundin and Christensen, 2017.

What goes on here can be clarified with Rappaport's concept of *enactment of meaning*.²⁴ 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.²⁵

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

²⁴ Rappaport, 1999. pp. 107ff.

²⁵ 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*.²⁶ 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

²⁶ Rappaport, 1999, p. 115.

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

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.²⁸

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.²⁹

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

²⁸ Slavoj Žižek, 1989, p. 32.

²⁹ 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.³⁰ 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

³⁰ 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.³¹

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.³²

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.³³ The drawback, however, connected to the stance of

³¹ Cf. Pfaller, 2014, pp. 2f.

³² Žižek, 2006.

³³ 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.³⁴ 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.

³⁴ 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.³⁵

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*.³⁶

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

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

³⁶ 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’.³⁷

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.³⁸ 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.³⁹ 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

³⁷ Heidegger, 2010: §27, p. 123.

³⁸ Cf. Pfaller, 2014, p. 28.

³⁹ 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*.⁴⁰ 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*.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 15 et passim.

⁴¹ 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

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.⁴² 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.

⁴² 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.⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ 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

⁴³ Cf. Lundin, 2012.

⁴⁴ 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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