

Are there Common Places for Educational Research?

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As Zeus, transformed as white bull, raped Europa he brought her to a new shore. Once arriving, he told her, "*Immortal, your name will be! The new part of the world, which accommodated you, will be called from now on: Europe!*" So far so good – »Europe« as topos was born. According to the ancient saga the common European ground is found in Greek ancient mythology. This paper will raise the question if it is possible to find a concept of research that is able to map a common European educational ground. In the end, the question occurs: Does the European arena of education build on some common ground or do we, in some way, unify our national differences? But before the paper answers the question, some observations will be noted. Having outlined the current European situation, some starting points will be framed. Referring to these observations, a synopsis and a future research question will be drawn.

The contemporary situation in the European countries shows a crosswise overlapping of the welfare state and the nation state. Ill-defined social problems - security, health and salvation – are institutionalized by the welfare state (Offe 1996). On the other hand, education is a task of the nation state. As a result of the post-reformation compromise education was placed in institutions. In the era of nation building these institutions and the necessary professions (teachers) were the "nation makers". Since then, national institutions like schools, universities and supporting professionals solve the problem of uncertainty (Werler 2004). The globalization, the European project and even the Bologna process seem to break up this compromise. Yet in the end, this is *not* a question of neo-liberalism or privatization. The public sector's ability to adapt is challenged by this. These processes take away institutional guarantees and open up for a variety of possible solutions.

Starting point 1: Religion and language

Europe as a political, economic and cultural landscape is based on religions and languages (Barbour 2002). Apparent areas of languages and dominating religions are defined. However, they define not only regions and nation states but also areas of a special constellation of culture. For example, one might find that German pedagogy is stamped by the language (*Bildung*) and by two dominating convictions and its historical conflicts: Protestants and Catholics. In Austria, a combination of Catholicism and the German language conceptualizes education. The framework of Scandinavian education is based on the homogeneous tradition of Protestantism in connection to a special understanding of education: *folkedanning*, the people's non-elitist education and enlightenment. In the end this led to the democratic tradition of schooling in Scandinavia (Werler 2004). In Western Europe one could outline a counter-opposing crossing: namely, the elitist tradition of schooling in France (Hörner 2002). In the last two hundred years of the development of the nation state in Europe, different traditions of education and, of course, of teacher education have been established - either deliberately or as a matter of evolution.

Starting point 2: The Scandinavian situation

Teacher education in the Scandinavian countries is under reconstruction. These countries are also connected to the Bologna Process. However, it seems to be very difficult to implement not only new structures of teaching and learning, but also the idea of educational standards (Broadhead 2002, Lindblad et al. 2002, Karlsen 2004).

Thus, the ongoing research project (Tomorrow's Teacher Education in Scandinavia) shows that *topoi* – the common

places – of Scandinavian teacher education are motivated by the pupil, ideas of community, common education (*folkelighet*) (see Graubard 1988), prudence and individual development (Barrow 1995, Cuban and Shipp 2000). These topoi are opposed to descriptions of European generic and subject specific competencies of teacher education, as they are defined by the Tuning-Project (see González and Wagenaar 2003). The project highlights instead the curriculum, the individual, intellectual knowledge and qualification (see *ibid.*, 61-98, 125- 136). Both concepts could be understood as common places (topoi).

Synopsis and an emerging question

These starting points could be understood as an expression for the “pressure” in the educational systems. Both because of the Bologna process and because of national developments these educational systems have to deal with structural changes. In the light of the strong European cooperation and the Bologna process it seems to be very necessary and promising to look for common European starting points or even common educational concepts. These efforts could document that a European core of education exists. However, currently there is no adequate instrument for the analysis of common thinking patterns or ideas available. Jan Assmann (1997) and Maurice Halbwachs (1980) have offered analytical concepts to show a collective memory. However, these count only for content of the collective consciousness. Likewise, Richard Dawkins (1976) has supplied instruments that are insufficient for this task. The mem-theory explains only the transfer of ideas between generations. Modern historiography (e.g. White 1973, Kocka 1984) reaches its borders by explaining the archetypes of the lifeworld. Even cultural history doesn't succeed because of its functions. What might help? This paper will argue for the significance and observance of educational topoi as instruments for research. In order to do this it seems necessary, however, to formulate the precondition of all education, namely, its ambivalence. On this basis the ancient understanding of topos will be outlined, before a modern interpretation of the Greek concept will be sketched. Following this, resulting methodological problems will be discussed.

A possible key?

The following paper tries to grasp the concept of the topos - basic concepts of understanding. Furthermore, its analytical performance will be carried out. The paper tries to make use of this concept for research on education. The semantic connotation of *topos* seems to be extensive enough to cover common and fundamental cognitive images and concepts of education in Europe.

The concept of topos can be more effective as the description of national mentalities or the analysis of national history. Finding topoi – the basic concepts of understanding – refers to basic prerequisites of the concepts of education. On the one side, they are intelligible to all. On the other, they can be filled with different meanings – according to the *Zeitgeist*. The task of every society is to define the content. As analytical outline, the topos is powerful enough to explain foundations of national, regional or even local educational concepts. At the same time, it will be possible to highlight cross national relations. Topoi can offer some relevant (theoretical) criteria of comparison (*tertium comparationes*) of the foundations of a common European educational concept.

Education is subjective and objective at the very same time. In this way education differs from other sciences. As systems they try to acquire knowledge – based on empiricism,

experimentation and methodological guided research. This is also education's task. But, education has also to deliver concepts of education. In brief: education has to educate! This ambivalent state has to be revealed, to show where the *topoi of education* find their starting point.

Ambivalence of education

In one of his lectures on education Schleiermacher asks: “What does the older generation want to do with the younger one?” and he continues, “How will the activity meet the object and how will the result correspond to the activity?” (Schleiermacher 2000, 9). These simple questions show the basic problem of education. In contrast to science, which developed a well-ordered and logical field of knowledge and description, education has to understand itself as ambivalent. The subject-matter is not only a fact but also a matter, a task. The pupil has to be taught and fostered. This double-bind situation of theoretical and practical intention opposes objectiveness (Bateson 1972).

This double-bind situation is also illustrated in the fable of *Hyginus*.

As ‘Care’ once crossed a stream, she saw some clay: she picked up a piece thoughtfully (contemplative) and began to shape it. While she considered in herself what she had created, Jupiter came up to her. Care asked him to provide spirit to the clay form. This he was pleased to do for her.

But when she wished to give her name to her creation, Jupiter would not allow it and said that his name ought to be given to it. While ‘Care’ and Jupiter argued over the name, the earth (Tellus) came up and wanted the creation to be named after her since she had, after all, given it a part of her body.

The three claimants asked Saturn to settle the matter. And Saturn gave them an apparently just decision as follows: ‘You, Jupiter, because you have provided the spirit, should receive the spirit when the creature dies; you, earth, because you provided the body, should receive the body.

But because ‘Care’ first shaped this creature, so should it be that she possesses it as long as it lives. And because the name is subject to dispute, so should it be that it is called “homo”, since it is made out of earth (“humus”).

This fable emphasizes that it is impossible to flee from the two-sided term “care”. Every human being finds oneself in the hands of »Care«. On the one side every human being needs care. On the other side every human being has to take care of others. They should become members of the society too. That is the classical double-bind situation. Consequently, every style of living is a variation of care (see Blumenberg 1987). Neither is it possible to love without worrying (about the other), nor is teaching possible without learning. But created situations of learning and teaching are the fundamental condition of the existence of mankind. As there is no teacher without pupils; there are no pupils without an educator.

Life then takes place in the meeting (and conflict) with the other. Only the one who adapts himself to a permanently changing world will survive. To put it into other words: learning is universal for the pupil and the teacher. Openness to the world, diminution of instincts (Gehlen 1997) as well as the lack of a specific environment (Uexküll 1973) in combination with the ability to teach and the ability to learn forms the greatest adaptability advantage of man. The combination of these features (*Umweltföhiheit*) releases him from the world.

The anthropological determination of man to live is substantially caused by his ability to enter the world and to make contact with others. This world-ability (*Weltföhiigkeit*),

understood as culture-ability (Kulturfähigkeit), has to be acquired again and again since it isn't of constant nature. If man is a creature who needs the other to become himself, then education gives this promise of salvation. Education can then be understood as the worry about the existence of man (see Blumenberg 1987: 197pp). The core of all educational concepts shows itself in the idea that man should have world without being world.

Nonetheless, this anthropological constitution of man doesn't provide any information on the question of: What social conditions and which strategies of education are considered as desirable? The question remains open: How shall the perfection and improvement of the improving one be carried out? Because man must be educated, and there aren't any eternally valid strategies, examples of man were again and again devised while educational dreams were designed. Many of them fell into oblivion. However, constant cores are also observable. Despite all contradictions, they are formed in educational contexts.

If man must first acquire world-ability, he reveals himself as genuinely educable and in need of education (Langeveld 1965). Because of that, education is not only necessary but also possible. This means that the concept of education is obtained by that. If man becomes understood out of education and education out of man, then this will constitute the educational relation. Only human beings can educate (teach) human beings (pupils) to become man. This is also stated philosophically. Following Kant, man becomes man only by education (Kant 1878). Then, education refers to all and comprises the demand for equal opportunities.

However, education has to be created generally too. One has to emphasize not only the result but also the process. Furthermore, it has to take place by dealing with the general and the epoch-making (Klafki 1963). In this respect people have to learn in order to change the condition of "lack of education". Then they have to organize life – based on the *conditio humana* – by intellectual constructions. Consequently, these constructions must be based on collectively shared beliefs, ideas and imaginations. This is also the disposition of European topoi on education.

Thinking and geography

The history of science and of classical logic in the ancient world was closely combined with the history of the description of earth and with cartography. Geography – description of earth – was studying spaces, places with the help of geometry. So, on the door of his academy Plato put the words: "Only he who thinks geometrically may enter!" Since then, science occurs as a geometric modeled room and therefore (nearly) all thinking is topological (see Reichert 1992: 87). Thinking and cognition is bound to places (*loci*).

The relationship between thinking and geography is expressed in two aspects: firstly, how the elements of thinking – thoughts – are imagined; secondly, in the way how one imagines the order, the placement of these thoughts. For Plato and Aristotle the ideas are found in a notional room which followed the model of a geographical landscape. The landscape was marked by places. This becomes particularly clear in the ancient art of memory (see Yates 1969). On the Aristotelian map thoughts became placed like areas. Their position and their outline were indicated by words, which described their relationship. It was assumed that the elements of this landscape are certain facts (the principle of identity), they cannot be simultaneous at two places (free of contradictories) and they define boundaries (principle of the impossible third party). If the world shall be organized reasonably, one has to select,

to generalize, to draw distinctions and to draw connecting lines. So, ideas on space and geography form foundations for thinking. These places (*topoi*) are defined as classical starting points for reflection. An absurd counter example illustrates this. The "Chinese Encyclopedia" of Borges groups animals as follows (1966: 212):

a. "animals, who belong to the emperor	h. to this group belonging ones behaving like mad ones
b. embalmed animals	i. the ones who are painted with a brush of camel hair
c. domesticated ones	j. and so on
d. milkpigs	k. the ones who have broken a water pitcher
e. sirens	l. the ones who look like flies"
f. fabulous beasts	
g. straying dogs	

The absurd classification occurs because the space in which it was imagined isn't conceivable pictorially.

The places

From the ancient world until the first third of the 19th century, the term *topos* was used in an unconsidered manner. This changed as Curtius made use of the term for literary research. He was the first to show that the term belongs to rhetoric, the origin of didactics (for example, Platon: *Gorgias*: 456a-457c). His function was *inventio*: finding of places for ideas. As a concept of research the term "topos" was used for the first time in 1932 (Jehn 1972: VII). As a program for research Curtius outlined the concept of *topos* in 1938 (Curtius 1972) and extended it in the following years (Curtius 1944). Most influential was his work on European literature and the Latin Middle Ages (Curtius 1993).

A definition of "topos" starts best with an explanation of what it is not. Even if one might use the following semantically coded elements, as for example an image, metaphor, symbol, allegory, formula or cliché, they are not *topoi*. An ancient counter-example illustrates this. If one wanted to become a speaker he was in need of instruction; the first and most important part of his education in rhetoric was "*inventio*". It is the theory of finding of forms, which lead to arguments and overview. So, *inventio* shows the places (*topoi*) from where it was possible to find arguments for the speech.

Aristotle used the term "topos" as a formal element. But he didn't define it by subject. Instead he outlined the *topos* as a norm to find places for evidence. However, the *topos* isn't the evidence itself, but its principle. (Veit 1972: 173). Later on classicists defined *locus communis* – *the common places* – as a general subject, as a *topos*. It comprises here the entire knowledge of a society and all the cultural assets. Therefore, the concept »topos« becomes a form of order.

As a first result of this analysis it becomes clear that *topoi* have recurrent and spacial presence. They are used as undisputed arguments and expression of collective experiences. They do return in truncated form (e.g., buzzwords like perfection or improvement). Then they might be used as "places of overview". Then these *topoi* can be used as starting points for any debate on educational concepts. According to this, *topoi* aren't rigid and unchangeable patterns. Their meaning and consequences change according to the changes in the world around us. New *topoi* may occur, may change in phases of upheaval. As a result *topoi* are used as goldmines for the train of thought (*argumentorum sedes*).

Even the term "educability" (*Bildsamkeit*) is implicitly or explicitly used in most educational concepts. It gives expression to the idea that man has to be educated and that man possesses the necessary pre-conditions to be educated (by others and by himself). As an understanding of the basis of education, which answers the questions: "What shall we do? How shall we act?" it is under constant redefinition by the

society and by educationalists.

Following Veit, a topos appears as a (ruling) thinking pattern (*Denkform*), which is also a "form of thinking of being of reality" (Veit 1972, 82). According to Kuhn (1996) it is possible to characterize the topos as the "structure of being". Therefore "educability" is a necessary precondition of human beings. The thinking pattern intends and interprets the structure of being. The social discourse on education builds thereupon. So topoi can simultaneously take effect on a variety of levels: educational, social psychological, sociological, political or even economical.

Another example of a topos is the human being, if it is understood as a "zoon politicon" (Werler 2005). We normally award him therefore "educability" (*Bildsamkeit*). Educationalists understand him also as a creature that strives for *perfectibilité* (perfection). Didactical language uses terms like presentation, representation or even self-activity as topoi. But also terms like order, selection and sequensation are typical. Additional aspects are opened up by "equality of sexes" or "equality of opportunities". In the end all educational topoi create a promise: the promise of rescue by enlightenment.

If one tries to understand educational texts, contexts or even an educational situation, it is recommended to consider whether the plot follows the tradition of a topos. Does the plot provide a thinking pattern, which interprets the structure of being? Does the researcher find temporally independent concepts like "perfection"? Rousseau's "Emile" as well as the PISA-studies are based on this idea. In both cases a guardian is to be found (Rousseau 1998, OECD 2000). He points the way to good living as virtuous or even skilled adult. Although the idea develops from the medieval times and the ancient world, it is up-to-date.

Discussion

A topos should no be longer understood as an instrument of literature but as a method and tool for research. Here one may find the difference between ancient topic (Aristotle) and modern topological research. Topology as a concept of research may show constants and continuities. But it isn't about a collective idea history. The objective of topological research is to gain knowledge and the realization of a historically changed situation and its equivalent. Topological research will observe the change of the content of the topos as well as the change of the semantics used. Therefore, the guiding principles have to be: (a) finding a topos on its place; and (b) lighting up the horizon of meanings. Thus, one may ask in addition what metaphors and symbols were used.

Topological thinking wins objectivity when it confronts itself constantly with its problems. Therefore it has to insert itself into the unity of the discourse of the problem (Veit 1972, 66). Objectivity ensures by observation, isolation of findings, marking of results, comparisons, and it has to conclude in analogies. Thereby topological research allows the differentiation of the individual and the typical. This is only feasible, if topoi are compiled and developed out of the sources. Moreover, reasons for the transformation of meaning have to be given. Furthermore, the founding ground has to be disclosed: why does this topos exist? Since the topos is a strengthened and traditionally relevant matter of fact, topological research can't be – *consequently* – catalogue work or research on dependencies. In doing so, topological research is critical on self-evident writing of history. Finally, topological research maps the topology of the discourse.

Consequences for research

A possible arena for investigation could be the reform of teacher education in Europe. The break-up of national structures of the educational systems caused by the Bologna process, result in a debate on the national concept of education. In such a crisis long-lasting concepts will be shown, because ancient/old discourses and solutions will be installed. They are suggested as renewed solutions and they will be negotiated as solution. In this way solutions for a crisis have to build on topoi.

A topology of European teacher education has to map traditions of teacher education and its systems – which will be discussed according to the break-up. Furthermore, the relationships between the topoi have to be analyzed. One has to ask for the possibility of understanding education as a symbolic representation of society. On a more pragmatically level of research one should investigate cultural arenas (e. g. Franco-Romanic, German, Scandinavian, Slavonic) for teacher education. The emerging map will contain topoi as places and spaces of the educational arena and it will show the dominating ones.

Even if the text tried to understand the concepts of topoi some questions still remain unacknowledged. Does the current reform of teacher education in Europe have to consider cultural and semantic contexts? Is it possible to update education to justify decisions and developments by a diligent rhetoric of motives? If the answer given is to be yes, than it constitutes not merely a discussion. It forms a *representative* discourse, it pictures the world. Then, every discourse on education is based on topoi – they define the placement on the map. For the mapping of the landscape the representation of education in rituals, pictures, celebrations or symbols is important. They bring the educational instant to the mind. But finally, in the field of investigation research is missing. So, as Europa doesn't recognize where she is, the question for the concept and content of a common ground for a European teacher education is still unsolved.

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