The invisible subject in educational science

Abstract The crisis of education frequently is framed in terms of methods, where quantitative research is accused of making the subject invisible through quantification, whereas qualitative research is credited for the emphasis on subjectivity and the discursive construction of reality. Such formulations fail to take into account a longstanding critique that interpretive (constructivist) research, too, makes invisible the real, living subject who is coping with an inherently open life, placing in its stead a ratiocinating individual. In this article, an argument is made for a concrete educational science concerned with the person who is not only (agential) subject but also subject and subjected to the condition it contributes to producing. This subject never is in complete control over its condition, cannot ever know precisely what is currently happening, and at best witnesses rather than grasps or constructs what is going on. This viewpoint requires a rethinking of the subject in/of educational science. Such a project of rethinking the subject involves shifting the minimum units of analysis: from (inter-) action to transaction, from an experience [Erfahrung] to inchoate lived-experiencing [pereživanie, Erleben], from entities and processes to dramatic events.

Keywords an experience; lived-experiencing [pereživanie, Erleben]; drama; social relations; mimesis

1. Introduction

The subject is eliminated not only because in the most cases the imitation is turned into a little drama in the third person where the actors are elements but also because, given precisely the formalism, there is no question to consider the imitation as being, in its very content, something from the life of the particular individual. (Politzer, 1928/2003, p. 231, original emphasis)
The construction of the subject in and through educational research is not innocent but affects lives. This is so because, as academic discipline and (therapeutic) praxis, educational theory in particular is not an outside observer of this world; instead, it is a societal-historical endeavour bound up in the development of society and the essence of the human person it enables. Educational theory affects millions of people everyday—not in the least because teachers have been taught basic concepts as part of their training. Indeed, as one of the reviewers pointed out, theory permeates the entire educational process, or, as cultural-historical theorists would say, the entire activity system. Others are affected by theory and praxis when they become clients of the variously existing services that schools offer for their diverse populations. The subject of educational theory and research therefore is a question of the utmost importance (Henriques, Hollway, Urwinn, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1984; Holzkamp, 1983; Walkerdine, 2002). In teacher education, students are required to take courses in educational science (e.g., educational psychology, administration, and sociology). What future teachers learn about their profession and about learning and development of their future ‘clients’, therefore, is in part shaped by the courses they take.

There is a contradiction, however, which anyone who has worked in this field knows about and that is regularly articulated on the part of many teachers: the gap between theory and practice, between what future (and sometimes current) teachers are told about learning, development, problem solving, reasoning, or classroom management, on the one hand, and the realities of classroom life as lived through on the part of those who have spent time in the field, on the other hand (O’Leary, Wattison, Edwards, & Bryan, 2014). The gap between the two is and has been a primary issue in teacher education (Cabaroglu, 2014; Cheng, Cheng, & Tang, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2006; McGarr, O’Grady, & Guilfoyle, 2017). The gap has also been part of my own life history and before I knew about the phenomenon as a phenomenon with a name and as an object of scholarly research. I had taught for a year in northern parts of Canada, where those with
university degrees could teach even when they had not had teacher training—as long as they then took up courses by correspondence or during the summers. I took up a course in educational psychology—and turned out to be a troublesome student to my professor, for I voiced over and over again that whatever we were taught would not have worked in the classrooms where I was teaching at the time.

One of the most serious negative effects, perhaps, is the conception of the subject (teacher or student). We, the real, living subjects of the educational sciences disappear in the face of ratiocinating beings, who, like a digital computer, act in a finished world and ‘construct’ everything that is of interest to researchers. This is so in (most) qualitative as much as in quantitative research. Thus, teachers are to be in control of classroom life, ‘motivating’ (i.e. manipulating) and ‘controlling’ students so that they do what they do not inherently want to do on their own (e.g., Holzkamp, 1993; Osterkamp, 2002). Teachers and their methods are held accountable for student achievement, as if a causal relationship existed between the formers’ intentions and the latters’ behaviour. Anyone who has really taught (rather than talked about teaching) knows that classroom life depends on more than teachers’ intentions and that teaching does not mean ratiocinating each curricular action. Neither scientific (quantitative) nor interpretive (qualitative) research accounts for these ways of being alive in a classroom: as living subjects, we disappear from such scientific accounts. There is an ontological difference between the drama of life, the actual relations between people, and its narration, especially the narration of the all-knowing author (Lacan, 1966). There is no escape via the formal routes to social science, for ‘all attempts to surmount—from within theoretical cognition—the dualism of cognition and life, the dualism of thought and once-occurrence concrete actuality are utterly hopeless’ (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 7, emphasis added). Qualitative as much as quantitative research is responsible for the disappearing subject. This is so because the forms of research separate the lived act of cognition from the historical act of its realization, that is, an ex post facto look at what that act has accomplished. As a result,
human subjects are divorced ‘from the full vitality of their lives, from the motives, interests, and inclinations of the thinking individual’ (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 50).

Research divorces the constructed subject, which appears in publications, from the \textit{inchoate} lived-experiencing (\textit{Erleben, perezhivanie}) that makes our everyday lives. This divorce occurs in the transposition from life as lived to life as represented, which is created by means of formal research methods the specification of which has a designated space in a journal article. It is in this transposition that the drama of life is destroyed and the subject becomes invisible (Politzer, 1929). The gap between the living subject and the subject created in the research narrative can easily be detected in current scholarly discussions concerning Vygotsky’s category \textit{perezhivanie} [experience], the gist of which follows what has been discussed under ‘\textit{an} experience’ (Ger. \textit{Erfahrung}). Thus, ‘\textit{an} experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency . . . complete in itself, standing out because marked out from what went before and what came after’ (Dewey, 1934/2008, pp. 42–43). Elsewhere Dewey characterizes ‘\textit{an} experience’ as something standing out, and which, because it has transcended Being (life), therefore is an object of consciousness. The result is the image of persons who \textit{construct} their knowledge, identity, selves, their affects, others, and their lives. In this way, ‘an abyss has formed between the motive of the act/deed [postupka] and its product’ (Bakhtin, 2003, p. 50). This is the very abyss that distinguishes praxis, as seen from within the open-ended and unfinished happening of life. This unfinished happening is characterized by \textit{in-order-to} motives oriented toward an inherently open future, and theory, concerned with the finalized event characterized by a definitive \textit{because}-motive (Schütz, 1932).

This study is designed as a contribution to redefine the subject matter of educational research: the human subject caught up in and subject to life, whose consciousness is the

---

1 The transliteration \textit{perezhivanie} is predominantly found in the fields of education and psychology whereas \textit{pereživanie} is the accepted scholarly transcription from Russian.
result of this life rather than the other way around. In this study, the premises ‘are not arbitrary, are not dogmas, they are real premises that can be abstracted only in imagination. They are the real individuals, their action and material life conditions, those they find and those they generate through their own action’ (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 20).

2. Praxis of school life and the task of research

From the early to the mid-1980s, I was teaching in a town where the unemployment rate for 18–25-year adults was round 75%. Young people had little incentive to attend school. Duane, the former student of mine who appears in the narrative below, today describes life at the time as ‘tough’; and he commented on the perception that the teachers at our high school had gotten into the profession because this was the easiest way of getting a job. He concludes that it is a ‘surprise that any of us [students] managed to get an education’. Duane and I came to be connected again after some students from the school had contacted me in January 2017. I had never forgotten him. Over the 31 years that have passed since we were teacher and student to each other, I have repeatedly told two stories involving him in relevant contexts. It turns out that Duane, too, remembered certain events from our relation. As there is a lot to learn from this, the following begins with a summary of our recollections, which constitute the materials for a subsequent analysis. The results of the analyses are the basis for further developments in subsequent sections.

2.1. Accounts of drama and experience

In one of the few emails we exchanged, Duane wrote that he thought faculty and staff in the town expected the two of us ‘to be like lithium and water: The no-nonsense German teacher vs. the smart-assed local punk’. He noted having received the advice to stay out of computer science to avoid the inevitable clash with me; and he commented, ‘It didn’t quite work that way’. Duane recounted two specific events, as if supporting the
commentary. He told the first in this way: ‘I hadn’t been to your class for a few days. The principal caught me in the hallway and was pleased that now he had me—he knew I was supposed to be in your class at that time so now he had an excuse to expel me. All he had to do was get you on side. Knocked on your classroom door, explained the situation, and you said, “No, I just excused Duane five minutes ago to visit the restroom. There’s no problem”. Hahah, the look on his face was gold!’ The second event related to the last time we had seen each other face to face: ‘I remember the last words you said to me before you headed to Mississippi, ‘Never compromise your ideals, for nothing and nobody’. He then added, ‘And I haven’t!’ Duane concluded, ‘You certainly made a mark on my life’.

My colleagues had warned me that having Duane in class would be a nightmare; but it never turned out this way. There are three aspects of classroom life that I remember to the present day. First, one day Duane had come to class apparently having smoked a joint. He giggled and laughed. I talked to him first stating, ‘I hope you have a good time’, and explained that his contract allowed him to organize his work as he wished’. But I insisted that he could not interfere with the work of others. I suggested he go to the washroom or library to work. He never bothered anyone. The second event that stands out pertains to the one single instant when he had not submitted the deliverables on Friday afternoon at the end of a two-week contract. I called his father immediately before leaving school for the weekend. On Saturday morning, Duane’s work was on the doorsteps of my home. Third, Duane started coming to the computer science room after school, when he was virtually guaranteed access to one of the three available computers. He not only worked on achieving the goals he had stated in his contract but also began using the computers in other ways. I showed him how to use a word processor, and he began to type out his assignments for all his courses, which I helped him edit prior to printing them out. In the end, he did well not only in computer science: To the surprise of the staff, he ended up with the third highest GPA of his graduating year.
2.2. The task of educational research

Duane described the warnings he had received about taking computer science because of the teacher, and because others (teachers and unnamed individuals) expected there to be trouble if we ended up in the same classroom. His conclusion was that it did not turn out that way. I had been in a very similar position. My older colleagues who had taught for years at the school often had kicked him out of class; and they had warned me that Duane would be trouble, worse than his brother whom I had taught previously. It did not turn out that way. For Duane and me, our relation was transformative. We had almost nothing to do with each other outside the institutionally organised relation (e.g. when his parents asked me for advice on the computer brand) and yet for both of us there were aspects of the encounter that we not only remembered but also were part of the autobiographical narratives we told others about particularly marking life events.

An educational psychologist should be interested in understanding and explaining such events—especially happenings where there are anticipations (even if they are based on folk psychology) that two personalities would be clashing. Educational (psychology) theory should be interested in how as a result of a teacher–student relation, a student also comes to expand his power to act (i.e. using computers to do homework) and, in so doing, ends up with an unexpectedly high overall achievement (as measured by his grade point average). Moreover, educational (psychology) research should be able to explain how particular incidents become formative in the development of an individual, become ‘an experience’ from which the individual learns. It also should be able to show how relations with others become formative in the personality as a whole, not only with respect to small part of the life in which the encounters take place.

Most discourses in educational research are unsuitable for understanding and explaining how such open and unexpectedly ending events as the principal catching Duane have on the formation of an individual in the narrower and larger sense. Indeed,
the advice from textbooks of educational psychology would be unhelpful for dealing with Duane. Given the warnings I had received, I should have thought about control, for example, by considering offering ‘small rewards for good behaviour; pay[ing] more attention to well-behaved students than to troublemakers; ignor[ing] troublemakers who seem to crave attention’ (Sternberg & Williams, 2010, p. 411). As I was a relatively new teacher at the time, educational psychologists may have advised me to ‘speak to other teachers and the principal and request assistance’ (p. 411). I did indeed speak to other teachers. But if I had followed their practices, I would have kicked Duane from class in the way they did, or would have asked Duane to see the principal who might have suspended him from attending school for a few days. Like many other beginning teachers, I was confronted with a gap between the contents of educational (psychology) theory and the everyday world of the classroom. What is the origin of this lived rather than imaginary gap?

3. Transcription and mimesis (imitation) of life

Practitioners find themselves confronted with a gap between theory taught at the university and everyday school life (praxis). That is, there is a gap between (a) what is described in the research literature and the textbooks that reproduce the findings and (b) what practitioners live and live through on a daily basis. If there is indeed a gap, the reason for it may be sought in the transposition that occurs when what happens in the world comes to be described, by means of a qualitative or quantifying transcription, and what is explained in the pages of the literature. If there is a gap, it is because practitioners no longer recognize themselves and their situations. Unsurprisingly, research has been charged with confusing the results of a transcription with what it has transcribed, (an aspect of) the real life of the living human being: Research ‘commits a crude error . . . when it . . . presents its psychological transcription as if it were actual once-occurrence
The invisible subject

Being’ (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 11, emphasis added). This statement resonates the concerns in the quotation that opens this article, where the subject in the pages of the psychological literature, the imitation, is a third-person subject, which does not correspond to the real person that is imitated. The real subject—i.e., the one who not only acts but also is affected, the one who is given a world, is subject and subjected to it, and who undergoes events—is eliminated and thereby becomes invisible.

The narratives from school life presented above are ex post facto accounts of events rather than the inchoate, lived-experiencing of being-there (e.g., being a participant at the computer science lab door) and any participant account, when it becomes part of research, is further transposed by means of theoretical discourses available. A first difference exists in the fact that in everyday face-to-face encounters, discoursing is understanding, whereas language (as in texts) requires interpretation (Ricœur, 1986). This is so because the Self and its psychological Other live through events together, in a world that is common to them, so that the Self ‘lives in the acts of understanding the other’ (Schütz, 1932, p. 157). Others and their lived-experiencing are not only accessible, open to interpretation, but ‘in their being-there and being-thus are given without question’ (p. 157, original emphasis, underline added). In addressing the other, in anticipating a particular reply—an answer to a question, an acceptance or declining of an invitation—inherently act socially because they always already live in the acts of others (Mead, 1972). In contrast, the researcher no longer lives with human beings but thinks about them by taking the transcription as the object of inquiry. The consequence is that we attempt to access others’ lived-experiencing of consciousness only as objects of our thought rather than as simply given to us in the encounter. That is, the transcription of an event constitutes a transposition that brings about an abstraction of the sense of the action that it has as part of the transactional world (Politzer, 1928/2003). How might we understand the relations between the inchoate lived-experiencing and its transposing transcription as an experience?
Replies to the preceding question may be found in the disciplines of ethnomethodology and philosophy, both of which focus on the order of the world and how it is articulated. The articulation of order has been theorised by means of the notion of *mimesis*, a form of imitation. *Mimesis*, refers to the order in and of the everyday world: as it appears, is made visible, is acted upon, and is talked about in mundane activity (Ricœur, 1984a). Thus, the three participants in the event at the door to the computer science lab—Duane, the principal, and I—cooperate to produce an orderly phenomenon. They do so by exhibiting to each other whatever is required to make this a specific, recognisable form of encounter, acting not only to be understood but also to bring about particular types of replies and reactions (Schütz, 1932), such as when the principal wants to hear something from me. How people make and make visible what is happening is precisely the area of interest of ethnomethodology, concerned with the question of how people produce and actively orient to an orderly world (Livingston, 2008).

The interest of the formal analytic sciences is different. They create their own descriptions, textual narratives, that are the sources of and woven together with theoretical (explanatory) narratives. Beginning in the best of cases with video- or audiotapes, scientists use special methods, which are described in their publications, for extracting social and psychological order from their transpositions. In whichever form the scientist formulates the object of the inquiry, it no longer is in the original (now mythical) irrecoverable *Event*. It, occurring only once, has sunk into the past leaving scientists to work with their transcriptions (Ashmore & Reed, 2000). The order of the world articulated in this way is referred to as *mimesis*$_2$. This form of mimesis refers to the project of creating ‘the most exact correspondence possible between the literary work and the reality it imitates’ (Ricœur, 1984b, p. 12). It is a very different order because actions no longer are caught up in once-occurrent being, from which there is no time out, but are detached from the transactions of life. The actions are no longer inherently social but attributed to individuals (e.g., in transcriptions of talk). As such, actions can now be
treated as any other form of text (Ricœur, 1986). However, the understanding of text demands a pre-understanding of how the world works, ‘what human action is, in its semantics, its symbolic system, its temporality’ (Ricœur, 1984a, p. 64). As a result, ‘scientific consciousness borrows all its models from the structures of living experience’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 71) so that the ‘whole universe of science is built upon the world as lived [monde vécu]’ (p. ii–iii). The problem is that the social sciences generally fail to actively acknowledge this borrowing (e.g., Bourdieu, 1992). Mimesis, as a form of abstraction, implies formalism (Politzer, 1929); formal analysis and ethnomethodology—i.e. the science of the everyday methods people use to produce the order of common sense—are incommensurable and asymmetrical alternates (Garfinkel, 1996).

In the transposing transcription of life into textual form, the living subject disappears and becomes invisible. The transposing transcription constitutes an abstraction from the world, for ‘I can live more things than I represent to myself, and my being is not reducible to what expressly appears to me concerning myself’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 343). This is so not only in quantitative research but also in qualitative research employing special methods and procedures in the construction of its objects. Qualitative research in particular constitutes the subject as a ratiocinating being, who ‘constructs’ knowledge, identity, subjectivity, intersubjectivity, gender, and so on.

When the theoretical order created by means of the formal methods is returned to the everyday world, for example when teachers attempt to apply theoretical concepts from their educational (psychology) course to their own classroom, a reconfiguration of the praxis may occur. Such a reconfiguration, which occurs when theoretical concepts of the order mimesis are brought to everyday praxis, is referred to as mimesis (Ricœur, 1984a). A gap becomes evident, for science produces transposing transcriptions, and

---

2 With some exceptions, such as ethnomethodology, phenomenology, and critical sociology.
produces an order that requires special methods to be seen. Because the transposition from mimesis\textsubscript{1} to mimesis\textsubscript{2} destroys the drama of life, ‘the inductions effected on the results of the transposition cannot enclose any lessons concerning the drama’ (Politzer, 1929, p. 60). This makes intelligible the distinction between the teachings of educational (psychology) research and the praxis of teaching with which practicing and future teachers continue to be confronted with. The results of social scientific inductive endeavours appear empty, being formulated in the form of dramatic generalities that can be applied to the drama on which they are based.

4. Effects of the transposition of life into text

The preceding section shows how a substantive transposition occurs in the transcription (imitation) of dramatic life to produce the data and narratives of research, where the real drama is told in a different discourse that has its own necessities, leading to a different drama comprising an intellectualised subject and life (Bakhtin, 1981; Lacan, 1966). In this section, two consequences of the resulting transposition from the drama of life to its narrative account are presented. First, although every instant of life inherently is lived through with incomplete, open-ended, and once-occurrent experiencing (Bakhtin, 1993; Mead, 1932) it is accounted for it in terms of complete units of the type ‘an experience’. Second, although life is relational (transactional)—actions are interlaced and fundamentally social (Mead, 1972)—whereas transcriptions and accounts of events emphasizethe interaction of self-actional subjects, who (discursively) construct themselves and their world. If there is a gap between theory and praxis, it is in part because the real living subjects (e.g., pre- and in-service teachers) in the classroom no longer recognize themselves in the self-actional, ratiocinating subject as it appears in theoretical accounts of experience.
4.1. An experience vs. inchoate lived-experiencing

In both Duane and my accounts (stories), what has happened is described from an ex-post facto perspective. Each story presents an event that is a complete unit, with a definite beginning and ending. Thus, for example, Duane described the condition (having missed class) when the principal had caught him. The description of the instant is provided, where the principal speaks to the teacher, which, in the story, is to provide the reason for expelling the student. But there was a dramatic resolution (end) when the teacher affirmed the legitimacy of the student’s presence in the hallway. The whole event stands out from all the other things that have occurred at the time but that have since been forgotten. That is, this is ‘an experience’ in the sense of pragmatic philosophy, something special and unique that ‘has a unity that gives it its name’ (Dewey, 1934/2008, p. 44), which in this case may be something like, ‘The day I didn’t get expelled even though I wasn’t in class’. In the second of Duane’s stories, the name might be ‘the most important advice I received [from you]’. In my case, the names for the stories involving Duane might include, ‘What you do when a student comes stoned to class’ and ‘The day a student submitted his work on a Saturday’. When any such experience is recounted, it is ‘taking up into itself those [pasts] back of it, and in some degree reconstructing them from its own standpoint’ (Mead, 1932, p. 9). It is because of such reconstruction that some aspects of life come to be the causes of other aspects.

When the real situation at the door to the computer science lab unfolded, however, and prior to what I had replied to the principal, everything was up for grabs. Neither the principal nor Duane could know what I was going to say, and, thus, what the conclusion of the happening would be or indeed even without knowing whether my response would be the conclusion. The same, of course, also pertains to me at the time. When there was a knock on the door, I could not know who was outside and what was happening. The reply I provided, face-to-face with the two individuals was provided without the benefit of a
time out for considering the implications it would have. Certainly, it would have been impossible to understand or predict the long ranging impact that this moment in our lives would have on Duane for the remainder of the year and for the development as a person. The experience definitely is not a construction of Duane. He was subject and subjected to the situation, just as much as the principal and I were. Whatever happened shaped us participants. In popular language, one might want to say that Duane’s fate at that instant depended on my reply. He knew that he had not been to class for a few days, and so he might have anticipated to be suspended from attending school for a while. The principal in turn might have anticipated suspending the student, but certainly required knowing more, for otherwise he would not have needed to check with the teacher (me) first.

It is apparent from the preceding, that an experience can be had only after the fact. The situation is very different when we position ourselves within the unfolding situation. This situation cannot be called an event, for what kind of event this happening was going to be could be grasped only after the fact. However, when the principal had caught Duane, the student did not know what kind of event he was in. He witnessed that they were walking together to the computer science classroom and, for a while, he might have envisioned being suspended from school. But he could not know the end of the story until he was in a position to look back: it was not even a story for lack of an ending. From within the happening, not one of the three protagonists could know how everything will have turned out once they looked back. That is, nobody had an idea about how what he was witnessing later was part of an Event, which Duane recalled in the way he did. In alternate worlds, the principal might have rejoiced for a while finally having caught Duane in an act that warranted suspension; and the teacher might have wondered what was going on when the two were at the entrance to the computer science classroom. Accordingly, thinking and affect cannot be thought in terms of cause–effect relations, for it is in principle unknown what will have caused what prior to an end having been achieved (Schütz, 1932). Indeed, ‘the interpretation of things as events causes “things” to
disappear in the geometry of a space-time which is the modern edition of the rationalism of Descartes’ (Mead, 1932, p. 98). Both the quantitative (scientific) and the qualitative (interpretive) educational sciences, requiring special methods for extracting and interpreting the order of things, contribute to the disappearance of things generally and of the human subject specifically. The sense of the performed (lived) act can be obtained only from within this act, but ‘not from the theoretical transcription of it’ (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 12).

The difference between the open-ended, inchoate instant of life witnessed from within and the finished, ex post facto perspective on life also is apparent in Duane’s second memory. Whenever we last met, I may have indeed uttered those same words he now quotes me as having said. If he had heard the statement as advice, it could not have been more than a resolution, a plan (instruction) and disposition for future action. Research shows that the relation between plans (instructions) and situated action is inherently open to such an extent that even highly competent engineers and scientists may believe following their plans only to find out at a later point that they were doing something else (Suchman, 2007), which has led to the notion of a radical uncertainty with respect to future action (Roth, 2009). Thus, it is only after the fact that Duane can say with any certainty that he never did compromise his ideals. When we last met, there might have been an in-order-to motive [Um-zu-Motiv] to act without compromising in the future; but today, it becomes a because-motive [Weil-Motiv] for explaining why he never did compromise (Schütz, 1932). The problem of most research consists in the confusion of these two, very different forms of motives and in the failure to appreciate the associated difference in the relations between plans and situated (lived) actions when viewed from before or within the act versus the act as fait accompli.

The concept of experience also has been used in educational psychology, among others to conceptualize ‘consciousness [as] the experience of experiences’ (Vygotsky, 1997a, p. 41). This psychologist also offered a first articulation of experience.
[perezhivanie] as the unity/identity [edinstvo] of person and environment (Vygotskij, 2001). In pragmatic philosophy, too, the term appears, sometimes in the formulation ‘an experience’ as something standing out from the flow of life (Dewey, 1934/2008), at other times as something ‘neither subjective nor objective but as a method or system of organization’ (Dewey & Bentley, 1949/1999, p. 115) ‘when a name is wanted to emphasize the interconnectedness of all concerns, affairs, pursuits’ (p. 187). Yet this term is not used in either manner in a well-known textbook on educational psychology currently on my desk—even though it appears in verb and noun form 374 times in the book (Sternberg & Williams, 2010). Indeed, the English term *experience* is confusing because it is employed in very different, often inconsistent, and thus perplexing ways (Dewey & Bentley, 1949/1999). This is so even though philosophers clearly have distinguished two phenomena. On the one hand, there is what may be denoted by the description *inchoate, lived-experiencing* (involving witnessing and feeling) as equivalents to the German/French terms *Erleben (Erlebnis)/vécu* (e.g., Husserl, 1928; Merleau-Ponty, 1945; Schütz, 1932). On the other hand, there is *an experience*, a completed whole that is grasped only after some form of closure has been achieved (Dewey, 1934/2008); its equivalent would be the German/French pair *Erfahrung / expérience*.

In the recent scholarly literature, there is a lot of discussion around the concept of *perezhivanie* [experience], which both Vygotsky and Bakhtin used to translate *Erleben (Erlebnis)/vécu* (cf., editorial notes in Bakhtin, 1993; Zavershneva, 2016). What distinguishes the intentionality of the Kantian subject to its object is that the unity of the world, before being posited by knowledge in a specific act of identification, *is lived* (Bakhtin, 1993; Mead, 1938). Thus,

when an event is considered at close quarters, at the moment when it is lived through, everything seems subject to chance: one man’s ambition, some lucky encounter, some local circumstance or other appears to have been decisive. But chance happenings offset each other, and facts in their multiplicity coalesce and
show up a certain way of taking a stand in relation to the human situation, reveal in fact an event which has its definite outline and about which we can talk.

(Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. xii)

Once a form of closure has been achieved, the current state of the world is thought to be the outcome of what has happened before: effects are known. This allows picking out from the now-grasped event those aspects that might function as the causes of what has happened: ‘Causa is a potential to bring something about, invented and added to events’ (Nietzsche, 1954, p. 768, original emphasis, underline added). That is, the causal structure and analysis in terms of separate elements is the result of an ex post facto account (Schütz, 1932). Explanation ‘is the organization of the steps or means by which one reaches certain experiences’; it is an abstraction that ‘abstracts what we treat as a cause from what we treat as an effect’ (Mead, 1938, p. 221). Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, Bakhtin, Mead and others strongly argue against the intellectualization of the world that we not merely inhabit but actually live. Merleau-Ponty, for example, describes how the warmth of an area of red first of all is felt and lived, something we live and lose ourselves in before it comes to signify something other than itself. It is something lived before it has a cognitive function. Its parts make up a whole without leaving their place; and this whole exists prior to the parts (Mead, 1938). But afterward, in its cognitive function, the red no longer is present to me but represents something for me. The unity of the phenomenon (perceptive act) is lived, correlative with the body, before it is grasped and thought.

4.2. **Self-action and interaction vs. transaction**

Both Duane and my recollections manifest how in everyday life, future relations between people are predicted based on analysis by elements. Duane’s informants and my colleagues were predicting a troublesome relation between the student (‘smart-assed local punk’) and his teacher (‘non-nonsense German’) based on characteristics that were
attributed to them. What is here apparent as an everyday, common-sense method also is characteristic of scientific (quantitative) and interpretive (qualitative) research methods. Whereas this may easily be accepted as being a characteristic of quantitative research, some readers may doubt that this is the case for interpretive–qualitative research. However, it is easy to locate studies where qualitative researchers write about the power that teachers have over their students or where events are explained based on the institutional positions of the speakers (i.e. an event happens because the teacher says or does something). Such studies can be found despite the advice that the relation ought to be the focus of inquiry, and any power-knowledge differences will turn out to be the result of the relation, the result of struggle (Foucault, 1975). This corresponds to what we live and live through in any situation, where ‘power’ is not something grasped, but where we may struggle to make our voices heard in the face of an institutional superior.

Struggle easily is apparent when multiple institutional positions overlap, such as when an undergraduate physics student also is part of a research team investigating graph-related expertise of physics professors (Roth & Middleton, 2006). Neither the institutional professor–undergraduate student nor the researcher–researched contrast allows predicting what actually happened during the research-related session, which is indeed best described as struggle over ‘who is in the know’. Duane appropriately wrote with hindsight, ‘It did not turn out this way’. The fact that both of us were talking positively about what had happened back then suggests that the relation itself allowed us to be and become who we were and are today. Not only did we get along but also the relation left its mark on our respective lives. Cultural-historical psychologists likely would remind us—in reference to Marx and Engels (1978)—that societal relations are the genetic origin of all psychological characteristics and personality as a whole (e.g., Leont’ev, 1982; Vygotsky, 1989).³

³ English translations use the adjective social, whereas the Russian and German texts employ the adjective societal (obščestvennyj; gesellschaftlich).
The data as provided in the ex post facto narratives do not give us access to the inchoate lived-experiencing because everything is told and analysed from a perspective of hindsight. To see what is happening from a different perspective requires following the actors from within the happening and prior to their grasping what has happened to them. Moreover, to fully understand all forms of actions also requires emphasizing the actions of the recipients of communicative actions (Roth, 2014). A first step is achieved in the transcription of the hypothetical conversation at the entry door to the computer science lab (Figure 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turn</th>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(says) Isn't Duane supposed to be in your computer science class?</td>
<td>(hears) Isn't Duane supposed to be in your computer science class?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(hears) No, I just excused Duane five minutes ago to visit the restroom. There's no problem.</td>
<td>(says) No, I just excused Duane five minutes ago to visit the restroom. There's no problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>(says) Oh okay. (to Duane) Okay, go to class then.</td>
<td>(hears) Oh okay. (to Duane) Okay, go to class then.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1.** This transcription also makes visible that the recipients are actively listening (comprehending). **Responding** consists of actively listening and receiving, replying, and monitoring the effect of the reply.

Common forms of transcription list the words that participants in a communicative exchange produce. A second speaker then is assumed to interpret the preceding utterance, the construction of a reply, which then is externalized for the benefit of others. Such analyses often point out differences in the ‘meanings’ that individual participants ‘construct’. With such a manner of proceeding, researchers already analyse interactions, where the action of some second speaker follows the action of a first speaker: a completed action follows a completed action. In contrast, the present transcription, however, makes salient how the words that sound in the mouth of the principal
simultaneously ring in the ears of the teacher. There is one phenomenon, the sound, which integrates the participants. Indeed, that sound constitutes the relation of which the principal and the teacher are part. It is therefore not surprising to see that unit analysis considers the word to exist for both or not to exist at all (Vygotsky, 1987). Indeed, each individual lives in the consciousness of the other. This is so because ‘language is the practical, real consciousness that exists for other people, and only therefore also for myself’ (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 30), a statement that Vygotsky quotes at the very end of his last completed work Thinking and Speech (1987). We may think of this horizontal dimension of simultaneity as corresponding (with), where there is a material relation in which the two also come to be a little alike (corresponding to).

Even this modified transcription still does not capture the situation. If we approached it from the perspective of the duration of our immediate experience, there is a psychological, specious present that includes the past and future (Husserl, 1928; Mead, 1938). Thus, the recipients hear, ‘Isn’t Duane . . .’ At any instant, some of the sound has receded into the immediate past and there is an open future. Here, the teacher still does not know what is to come or what it is that the principal will have said after he has taken another turn. In everyday conversations, there is little time between two turns (e.g., Jefferson, 1989), too little if the recipient had to represent the whole of the Said and interpret it. Instead processing begins prior to information being complete, which means that utterances shape the reply prior to the availability of the contents of the complete statement (Vološinov, 1930). Thus, taking the perspective of the teacher, his turn at talk (turn 2) arises out of his active attending to the principal. That is, the response begins while and with actively listening and receiving, which in turn flow into replying. The act of responding therefore is diachronic. The reply is produced for the principal, in-order-to bring about a particular effect, and thus it is inherently produced for intelligibility and

---

4 The quotation marks have been left out in all available English translations.
plausibility (Mead, 1972). But the speaker cannot know whether the statement has any intended effect. The speaker therefore has to be monitoring the uptake of the statement (Figure 1). That is, the genesis of the act of speaking (turn 2) begins outside, in the speech of the other, and the monitoring of the effect ends with the subsequent act of speaking (turn 3). Any brain activity associated with the act of speaking would also extend from turn 1 to turn 3. Indeed, a Spinozist-Marxian analysis suggests that ‘to explain the event we call “thinking”, to explain its effective cause, it is necessary to include it in the chain of events within which it arises of necessity and not fortuitously’ (Il’enkov, 1977, p. 37). That is, turn 2 constitutes a stretch of text that cannot be detached from the context (turn 1, turn 3). We cannot therefore understand the teacher’s statement in turn 2 on its own and as the result of the inner properties of the speaker; the beginnings and endings of the observed chain of action are not located within his body (brain or mind). Instead, this act is connected into two other acts, which are those of the other (principal). It is only the first part of a whole, social act (Mead, 1938). The teacher’s act therefore is a constitutive part of a coming and going, a transaction.

Scholars interested in inchoate, lived-experiencing emphasize its transactional nature in contrast with the emphasis on the actions of the Self and interactions of different selves. Transaction on the other hand means that actions, actors, and situations cannot be separated into elements that somehow come to be connected. For example, with respect to aptitude, understanding the role of person characteristics in performance requires knowing environment characteristics, and understanding the role of the environment characteristics in performance requires knowing the relevant person characteristics (Mead, 1972; Snow, 1992; Vygotskij, 2001). Transaction means a continued flow from one actor to another (Ricœur, 1986), a ‘continual coming and going of one into another, at their dynamic interface’ (Mikhailov, 2001, p. 20). This leads to the fact that the nature of individual actions can be established only after the fact but not before or in the act.
Whereas life is indeed transactional, it is not the manner in which life is represented in the interpretive psychological and social science (Ricœur, 1986; Schütz, 1932).

There is another aspect in the unfolding of talk that has not yet been considered. As the first sounds emerge from the principal’s mouth (turn 1), the teacher does not know what is coming. Yet to have any hope in appropriately replying, he has to actively attend to the talk. He has to open up in order to receive without knowing what he is receiving (a friendly gift, a blow). In opening up to receive, the recipient, the real subject in and of life, is vulnerable and eventually may feel insulted, attacked, hurt, or accused.

The life we live and everything we find therein is relation and thus transactional. It is impossible therefore to account for events and phases of action through “final attribution to “elements” or other presumptively detachable or independent “entities”, “essences”, or “realities”, and [...] isolation of presumptively detachable “relations” from such detachable “elements”’ (Dewey & Bentley, 1949/1999, p. 133). Sense-oriented behaviour and action can be modelled on text; sense-oriented action in this sense is equivalent to face-to-face discourse. Thus, any ‘discourse of action is itself a part of the situation of transaction that flows from one agent to another, exactly as spoken language remains caught in the process of interlocution, or, if we may use the term, of translocution’ (Ricœur, 1986, p. 190). Action becomes an object for the social sciences through a form of objectification that is similar to the act of fixation of discourse into written text. ‘Thanks to this objectification, action is no longer a transaction to which discourse of action would continue to belong’ (p. 191). In the same way that writing opens up the process of interpretation, action, once fixed and thereby objectified, becomes available as an object to the social sciences. Just as the fixation of discourse into written text allows splitting the sense of an utterance from its production, the fixation of action makes it amenable to the detachment of the signification of an action from the event of this action.

5. Resuscitating the subject: theory in terms of drama
Concrete psychology does not put itself in the place of anyone; it analyzes the
drama and explicates the drama by that which it is effectively explicated qua
drama, that is all. (Politzer, 1929, p. 56)

This study is designed to be a contribution to the debate about the subject in and of
educational (psychology) research. It shows that the living subject disappears as a result
of the transposition that occurs in the construction of data, which are analyzed by formal
analysis that requires special method for making the psychological and sociological
orders of the world appear. This disappearance of the subject is the origin of the gap
between psychological theory (mimesis\textsubscript{2}) and the everyday praxis of people (mimesis\textsubscript{1}),
who therefore do not see how theory may transform praxis (mimesis\textsubscript{3}). The transposition
reduces the transactional world into a textual world where agents, actions, things, and
events are the basic elements of descriptive and explanatory narratives. Formal research
methods analyze actions after these have undergone a process of fixation, and thus lost
their nature as transactional phenomena. Ethnomethodology, on the other hand, returns to
the methods by means of which social actors constitute, orient to, and produce for one
another the orderly characteristics of the co-inhabited and jointly lived and lived-in
world.

An important field of research application is teacher education, where the outcomes
of educational (psychology) research are to provide teachers with the means to cope with
the world of praxis. The problem of educational (psychology) research thus exists in the
relationship between the world of text (mimesis\textsubscript{2}) and the real world that is to be
reconfigured through the event of mimesis\textsubscript{3}—that is, the different orders addressed in the
11th Thesis on Feuerbach between understanding the world and changing it (Marx &
Engels, 1978). This requires us to ‘return to the lived world that is prior to the objective
world, since it is in it that we shall be able to grasp the prerogative as much as the limits
of that objective world’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 69). That is, research can be made
relevant when it becomes concrete, that is, deals with the phenomena of everyday life rather than with abstractions. The field has to recognize its ‘crude error’ and shift from formal transcription to the ‘actual once-occurrent Being’ (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 11). How might this shift in the epistemic project be brought about?

The narratives from school life recount events including Duane. Each mini-story was an account of an experience; and each account was in terms of drama: The success of an otherwise recalcitrant student, dealing with a student stoned in class, and finding the work of this student on my doorsteps on Saturday morning. An essential aspect of the scenes from school life provided above is the dramatic nature of events: the unsuspected turn that life takes at the door to the computer science laboratory, the advice during a last encounter that becomes descriptive of an entire life, the orientation of a teacher that respects the individuality of a student, who, again unsuspectedly, turned out to be among the highest achievers of his graduating class. When teachers provide each other with advice, it is in these and similar ways rather than in the form of abstract concepts (including those from qualitative research).

In the introductory quotation to this section, Politzer proposes a turn to a concrete psychology that is realized when it takes as its subject the real drama of life. Readers may ask themselves: ‘But is a dramatic description not also a transcription?’ This is indeed the case. The difference comes about in the change of analysis. We are to analyze drama in terms of drama rather than in terms of isolated elements, including agents, actions, and causes and effects. The difficulties and crises of the field may be overcome in a positive, concrete approach, one that returns to the concrete life, which it constitutes as its subject, the object of its endeavours and inquiries. This implies returning to the unfinalized and transactional nature of life. A concrete approach to psychology and the educational sciences allows overcoming the antithesis that is constituted in and by the opposition of objective (scientific) and subjective (interpretive) research. It overcomes the opposition of the two psychologies, which define themselves in terms of their data as given from
external or internal perception. The data of a concrete science is not a simple perception of whatever kind but a perception interwoven with and rendered complex by comprehension. ‘The perception that this experience implies is external, and the comprehension by means of which it doubles itself is not a perception’ (Politzer, 1929, p. 56).

Vygotsky (1989) was taken by his reading of Politzer and stipulates: ‘psychology must be developed in the concepts of drama, not in the concepts of processes’ (p. 71). He suggests considering sociogenesis of higher psychological functions and aspects of personality in terms of drama. Here, then, a ‘renewed division into two of what had been fused in one’ (p. 58) may be observed, which detailed psychological studies of learning and development in school mathematics classes have shown (Roth & Jornet, 2017). The psychological functions, therefore, also can be most fully developed through and in the form of drama. Because of the sociogenesis of psychological functions, which remain ‘quasi-social’, the dynamic of personality is dramatic, full of internal struggles that are impossible in biological systems. ‘Psychology is ‘humanized’” (Vygotsky, 1989, p. 67) precisely when it takes dramatic form, which retains the transactional nature.

A concrete science analyses drama in terms of drama, that is, it is a form of unit analysis rather than analysis in terms of elements. The minimal unit of analysis is one that itself is drama, a transaction. This is quite apparent in the transcription, where transaction is made visible in the concurrence of speaking and attentive listening that make each turn a part of the conversational exchange: each turn belongs to two or it is not a turn in the exchange. The dramatic world is transactional, and its analysis requires retaining units that are themselves transactional. In that world, human beings are not ratiocinating subjects, who apply a priori and experiential concepts to life, but are subject and subjected to the conditions that they contribute to creating: the subject is an *advenant* (Romano, 1989) to whom things advene. In unfolding life, these subjects witness what is happening, which they grasp as a whole only when everything has been said and done.
This subject does not merely constructs its world (or itself) but is given a world—the subject as the gifted (Marion, 1998)—and affected by it (and others).

The revised view of the human subject—always caught up in an unfinished world where the effects of its own actions are as unknown as any other aspect of the future—has implications not only for the subject of education and educational psychology but also for their place in society. It is a view of a human being who competently copes with the challenges of living in a once-occurrent world that never repeats itself. The field is not oriented toward control but toward freedom, which Vygotsky saw as arising from mastering the passions by yielding to them. The discipline could then work on making a positive contribution to the world that acknowledges the fallibility of the subject in morally constituting the world to which it is itself subject and subjected in the immediate and distant future.

6. Coda

The preceding section states the implications of this study in general terms. Long before I was able to do so—25 years to be exact—I already experienced the consequences of the implied epistemology. I moved from my constructivist conception of teachers and students as ratiocinating, self-interested individuals to a conception of them as social persons caught up in events that exceed their grasp and control. The shift occurred in my life while I was still a high school teacher. It was liberating when I realized that teaching was not about students and me in opposition. Instead, who each one of them could be and who I could be was a function of our collective activity. The position was liberating because all of a sudden my theory (ontology and epistemology) corresponded to how I lived and lived through classroom life. This position also helped me in my personal life, when I no longer saw my relation to the significant another as the result of our pre-relational selves, but instead understood our respective selves as the
result of the relation. I began treating each student as an individual, with his or her special
needs; and I initiated discussions about rising and falling together (e.g. ‘you are in
trouble, I am in trouble; I am in trouble, you are in trouble’). Within the constraints of a
government-issued curriculum outline, small groups of students, in concertation with me,
designed their own activity sequences in the course of which they learned the specified
concepts. I understood that I could be a good teacher if our relation let me be such; and
they would acquire new behaviours if these existed as our relation.

The second important implication for me concerned research methods. For years,
there existed a contradiction between what I theorized as a (first natural, then
quantitative, and finally qualitative-interpretive) research scientist and the way in which I
lived and lived through everyday life. I realized that the ordered patterns that quantitative
and qualitative researchers exhibit by means of their special methods are not (necessarily)
relevant in life precisely because of the special methods required. Instead, what became
more important to me were the real methods that we use day by day to produce and
exhibit for each other the nature of and order in the everyday activities that we produce
together. Indeed, the competencies in these everyday (ethno-) methods are the
preconditions for those researchers who identify phenomena of social order only to be
analyzed by means of the chosen formal method.

References
dynamic relations of tape and transcript. *FQS: Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/
Forum Qualitative Social Research, 1*(3). Accessed at http://www.qualitative-
research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1020
Press.


