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***Talking to Prof. Dr Frist Osterwalder.
Education and schooling are subject
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Fritz Osterwalder may be a controversial figure for some; however, he has proven to be one of the most prolific and foremost thinkers of his discipline and has influenced the discourse in the history of education tremendously. He did so by writing, editing, and co-editing 19 books and – over the course of his career – publishing 134 articles and book chapters. Fritz Osterwalder’s academic journey starts in Zurich where he studied the subjects of German literature and culture as well as (general and Swiss) history. After having completed his program, he stayed in Zurich to obtain a Ph.D. degree in 1971. In his dissertation, he focused on republican poetry during the time of the French Revolution. Before working on his habilitation project, he was an academic assistant at Royal Holloway College (London) and worked as a freelance journalist and teacher. In his habilitation – which he completed in 1994 – Osterwalder critically analyzes Pestalozzi’s works as well as his institutes which he labeled a ‘pedagogical cult’. In 1995, Osterwalder became professor for general pedagogy in Karlsruhe and in 2000 he obtained the professorship for general and historical pedagogy at the University of Bern. His works focus primarily

on the relationship between pedagogy and religion, the intertwining of pedagogy and democracy, as well as the republican idea, and Swiss school history.

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Michaela Vogt (MV) & Annemarie Augschöll Blasbichler (AA): *Dear Mr. Osterwalder, thank you for taking some to talk to us. It is great pleasure having you as an interviewee.*

Frist Osterwalder (FO): Thank you very much on my part as well. It is a great – quite great – honor that you are interested in my historically based perspectives on educational research and education. Hopefully, they are of value for the readers of the journal.

MV&AA: *Let us start with a look at your own life history. What got you interested in Pedagogy and the History of Education, and what is their significance in your biography.*

FO: I owe my reflection on education and the history of education and pedagogy to two persons. While growing up, I was already involved in discussions about school as both of my parents were teachers. While studying at university I started to teach at school. Also, I participated in building up a school for deaf pupils. While I was working as a journalist my involvement as a teacher continued. But at that time the subject of pedagogy itself was never of a deeper interest for me.

While I was studying – German studies Germanistics, general history and Swiss history – I attended a course about political reflections on the Helvetic Republic (1798-1803) which was held by my highly esteemed teacher Leonhard von Muralt, a liberal historian. He gave me the task to analyze Pestalozzi's argument about the Helvetic Republic as the first modern democracy in Switzerland as well as the historical relevance of that argument. Leonhard von Muralt saw Pestalozzi as the founder of modern liberal-democratic individualism. In my analysis, I countered that Pestalozzi turned his back on the old-European republicanism and its public moral and individuality after the slide of the French Revolution into terrorism. But at the same time he didn't orient towards a liberal democracy and civil freedom, but towards inner morality and individuality, which he saw – just like in pietism – as superior to any social order. Henceforth, also his concepts of education were oriented towards his inwardness and absolute inner morality. My reflections on Leonard von Muralt's perspective on Pestalozzi in connection with modern liberal individuality and public morality as well as on neo-pietistic inner morality and individuality was extraordinarily fruitful for me. They were the starting point for my historically based scientific interest in school and pedagogy.

Significantly, the confrontation with Pestalozzi also influenced my second intense contact with educational research and finally, this contact made me feel at home in the academic field of the history of education. It happened almost 20 years later when I met Jürgen Oelkers, who had just taken over the professorship for general pedagogy in Bern. He was planning a historical research project about

Pestalozzi and his educational influence and opened up the opportunity to plan and to carry out this project with him. While I worked for and with Jürgen Oelkers, I could develop a very fruitful empirical view on educational discourses and institutions. This view ultimately resulted in my habilitation in educational science.

MV&AA: *Could you please give us a brief insight into your academic career, your motivation for doing research within this field and the main topics you focused and focus on?*

FO: I studied German and history in Zurich and received my doctorate 1971 with a thesis on the work of Friedrich Maximilian Klingler. He was a contemporary of Goethe and Schiller, but instead of joining the main discourse, he oriented his work more in the field of modern republicanism as it was developed in France and the USA. After my graduation I spent one year at London University (Royal Holloway) where I primarily taught German as a language to students of German philology. As I couldn't start with a promising and interesting academic path during that phase, I returned to Switzerland and began to work as a journalist – in parallel I taught at vocational schools. This changed in 1987 when I started working at the institute of Jürgen Oelkers. There I learned a lot and could develop two additional fields of interest around the area of historical educational research: the historical development of the schooling and pedagogy in the context of democracy and economy, and in the context of church and theology. These two fields of interest framed my research activities until I retired in 2012.

After completing my habilitation in 1994, I received a research grant from the Swiss National Science Foundation (Schweizerischer Nationalfond) for my empirical research. Based on this support I started to develop a project that brought together my two new fields of interest as it focused on the question; how church/ theology and the economy interact in the public debate about school in modern times. Only one year later in 1995 I took over a professorship at the pedagogical college of Karlsruhe and therefore had to limit the work on my two fields of interest. But similarly, I could develop a deeper insight into German teacher education and the fruitfulness of the historical perspective on school and pedagogy while teaching in this program of studies. In this process I focussed on the development of schooling and pedagogy in the context of French Jansenism and German pietism and on a reflection about school during the breakthrough of the empirical sciences (England) and modern democracy (USA, France, Switzerland).

In 2000, I successfully applied twice for a professorship for general pedagogy: at the Universities of Münster and Bern. Finally, I decided to return to Bern where I worked as a professor till my retirement in 2012. In Bern, I was head of the national research program «education and employment» («Bildung und Beschäftigung») from 2000 until 2004, which was approved by the Swiss parliament. In 2008, I initiated a project for the evaluation and publishing of the so-called Stapher-Enquête from 1799 together with the modern historian Heinrich Richard Schmidt (University of Bern), the folklorist Alfred Messerli (University of Zurich) and the educationalist Daniel Tröhler (University of Luxembourg). It was set up as a total survey of the state of schools in the Helvetic Republic as well as on their perspectives. The project was

approved in 2009 and ran till 2015. It offers an astonishing insight into the Swiss school system in advance of the great liberal reform of the 19th century – a reform that described itself as the origin of the availability of institutionalized education for the entire Swiss population. In publishing the «Enquête» we could give proof to the fact that already in the 18th century institutionalized education covered practically the whole population. Furthermore, the lessons were mostly held by teachers who had already reached a social status similar to or better than the one of craftsman.

After my retirement in 2012 I continued to work on my fields of research interest by adding a historical discourse which reaches back further in history. I asked about the decline/ destruction and/ or continuity of the Roman school system in the Middle Ages. Doing this kind of research without any pressure to publish the results and to transfer them into teaching as fast as possible is a kind of deceleration I really enjoy.

MV&AA: *You yourself came up with some pretty controversial arguments. In particular, we are thinking about your habilitation on the Swiss national icon Pestalozzi. What made you question the widely accepted common-sense narrative, and how did you pursue your research? Also, what were the reaction of your colleagues as well as the scientific community towards your work?*

FO: While working with Jürgen Oelkers on the research project about the impact of Pestalozzi we started based on two general assumptions: a. that Pestalozzi's concepts were fundamental for the modern discipline of pedagogy and b. that Pestalozzi's schools were constitutive for the development of modern school systems in general as well as for modern elementary schools in particular. I could confirm neither of these assumptions by my research activities. Pestalozzi's concepts were not part of the kind of pedagogy that was taught in the seminarist teacher education in Germany. Also, his school concepts were not adapted during educational reforms in the modern times – neither in Germany nor in Switzerland. In Germany, teacher educators like Diesterweg publicly distanced themselves from Pestalozzi's teaching methods. In Switzerland, the same was true for liberal reformers and teacher educators like Thomas Ignaz Scherr. They refused to deal with Pestalozzi's status-oriented concept of education and with his mechanistic pedagogy oriented towards inwardness. But at the same time Diesterweg was interested in the fact that Pestalozzi was identifiable with a country on its way to democracy and that he was independent from the church in a phase where the church still controlled most of the schools. From this point of view, German teacher education and pedagogy as a relevant field of knowledge for this training program referred to Pestalozzi as a kind of symbol. In Switzerland, this metaphor came up in the second half of the 19th century. It did so in a phase when the democratic national state Switzerland needed to assert itself against different authoritarian neighbors – also by referring to Pestalozzi as a symbolic figure who founded schools and set up an important basis for modern democracy. Based on that narrative, he became a national hero of modern Switzerland at the end of the century, and he entered both, the public discourses about school and education, as well as the subject of pedagogy as part of teacher education. Additionally, the figure became a permanent part of the newly developing academic discipline of educational research.

Due to these findings, colleagues, educational researchers as well as teacher trainers, teacher advocates, and educational policymakers did not respond to the result of my research at all or reacted dismissively. In doing so they defended the continuity and credibility of the moral claims that were part of their discourse. Nevertheless, a quite fruitful and continuing discussion about my thesis also began to evolve. By widening the view we discussed about the origin and the continuity of the modern educational system, especially of the elementary school («Volksschule») based on the findings in the Stapfer-Enquête. Also, we discussed the development of pedagogy as an educational discipline, of public discourses and science in analogy to the tradition of religious, neo-pietist educational discourses. These kinds of discussions are still ongoing and also research has to deliver some findings in that regard.

MV&AA: *A second key focus of your work has been the intertwining of or relationship of religion and pedagogy. Could you outline why these concepts are so central in our culture, and what function they may fulfill?*

FO: Since the Middle Ages, schooling and education were institutionalized matters of religious and ecclesiastical claims in Europe. Institutions of education, family and school were controlled by the church. Also, the discourses about them were shaped by religion and its moral and theological claims as standardizing references. In modern times, this problem was the subject of an extraordinary, striking political effort. In France, since the founding of the 3rd republic, the laicist constitution of school has been one of the fundamental disputes. In Switzerland, this concern became a constitutional struggle in 1872. In Germany, the claim was dropped during the empire. In Latin America and in the colonial world, the interrelation of church and school, pedagogical discourse and religion remained one of strong references until well into the 20th century. In this dispute, the nature of the public discourse, political statements as well as discourses amongst teachers and within the academic world played a decisive role. In parts, the dispute was contested by substituting analogous constructs of love of country, education («Bildung») – of the inner human – as well as of Pestalozzi in place of the religious constitution of education. If we are looking for rational discussion about education, schooling and educational sciences today, the knowledge of this tradition is indispensable.

MV&AA: *Do you have thoughts about the presence of history of education in universities at the level of teaching and at the level of professorships? What should be added, readjusted, or changed in the universities regarding the history of education?*

FO: I am convinced that universities, where educational sciences is part of teacher education, should strongly intend to strengthen historical educational research. Education and school are subject to intentional, moral, and political decisions. Also, pedagogical discourses and large parts of science are oriented towards them. The only way to deal with this matter of fact scientifically, and from a distant perspective is through a serious historicization.

Also, the science of history is highly interested in the history of pedagogy as the formation of modern national and constitutional states and the corresponding social structures are inconceivable without the development of school systems. A lot of social and political differentiations in the current western world can be traced back to different developments in the educational sector. The history of schooling and the corresponding discourses have been largely passed over by modern historiography – assuming that educational research would take care of them. As a consequence, the modern historiography of Europe can draw on a history of universities, but except for France, the history of primary schools has still to be written.

MV&AA: *Based on your experiences of and observations over the last couple of decades, what would you identify as fruitful fields for investigation which could conserve (or even expand) the history of education's relevance and appeal? Also, which methods do you consider most relevant for the future?*

FO: The history of pedagogy and especially school historiography are in many countries still referring to basic political assumptions of school and social reformers of the late 18th and 19th century. Hence, they describe Europe as a pedagogical desert even though current research projects on the 16th and 17th century draw a different picture. In England as well as in France institutions and discursive concepts were undergoing a profound process of renewal and adjustment to the major social and political changes of that time. To include historical educational research in these research projects seems to be quite beneficial from my point of view. Even though I could barely involve myself actively in these kinds of research activities, I'd be very interested to read about it. Regarding the research method, I would like to emphasize that the investigation of the development of discourses and concepts always correlates with institutional reality and its changes.

MV&AA: *How would you advise a new post-doctoral scholar coming into the history of education? What's the qualification process for the field and are there national as well as international variances?*

FO: As far as I am entitled to give advice here, I would split it into three parts: 1. Focus your own research on a topic where previous pedagogical historiography or the public discourse start their argumentation based on certainties. 2. Don't transfer research results about one cultural/ national space of pedagogical history to another one as there are many essential differences that you need to keep in mind – such as national, confessional and cultural ones. 3. Integrate your own research into research results of other international projects as that is the only way to be able to identify general trends and differentiations of significance.

MV&AA: *How would you describe the interdisciplinary activities of researchers in the history of education in terms of a national as well as international perspective? Which further steps of development are necessary in that regard?*

FO: In that regard I have had great experiences during my career, and I would like to see them continued. I participated in an interdisciplinary research group «Society for the History of Universities» («Gesellschaft für Universitätsgeschichte» (GUW)) in which historians, educationalists, theologians, lawyers, and historians of science, among others, took part. The research volumes of this society impressively prove the fruitfulness of a practical interdisciplinary approach. Regarding the internationalization of research, events like the ISCHE (International Standing Conference for the History of Education) conferences, and the meetings in Leuven and Ghent can be seen as important steps. I myself participated in extraordinarily fruitful international research networks with Franco Cami in Florence, Serge Tomamichel in Lyon, and Pia Schmidt in Halle, amongst others. There is one experience I want to highlight in particular, as I am convinced about its importance for the future development of our academic discipline. My colleagues David Labaree at Stanford and Daniel Tröhler in Luxembourg and I held an annual one-week seminar for doctoral students where each of us presented and discussed their current research projects. From these seminars and discussions, various networks and relationships have emerged and even have survived the demise of the institution and my retirement.

MV&AA: *Has the history of education become a global discipline? How does the history of education differ between nations, and what are the similarities?*

FO: Still, historical educational research is very much shaped by national and cultural boundaries. School systems became carriers of national boundaries in the 19th century – a development that is shaping and influencing our academic discipline until today. To analyze and to transcend these borders in historical educational research is certainly an important desideratum in present times, to which I have dedicated myself in my work.

MV&AA: *Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us and sharing your well-balanced and insightful thoughts on the history of education with us.*

