TEACHING AS ATTENTION FORMATION

A RELATIONAL APPROACH TO TEACHING AND ATTENTION

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Abstract

The purpose of the thesis is to put forth and explore a notion of teaching as a practice of attention formation. Drawing on educational philosophy and the Didaktik/Pädagogik-traditions, teaching is explored as a relational and lived-though practice that can promote, form, and share attention. In the context of teaching, attention is connected to the acts of showing and observing. As such, teaching can be seen as a complex of relations that emerges through the intersection of the intentions of the one who is showing and the one who is observing. This intersection creates a tension between the self-active student and the paths made possible for this self-activity. The pedagogical dimension of this tension can be expressed through the principles of the summons to self-activity and Bildsamkeit. By turning to some key-texts of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, I explore how the notion of teaching as attention formation can be understood from within a radical relational perspective on education and also how attention itself can be thought of as an educational phenomenon. From this critical relational perspective, where the relation is seen as constitutive of educational situations and where the possibility for uniqueness, difference, and freedom are regarded as central characteristics for a democratic conception (and ethical realization) of education, I interpret Rancière’s notions of intellectual emancipation and partage du sensible as political/aesthetic analogues to the summons to self-activity and Bildsamkeit, respectively. While the event of intellectual emancipation, although constituted relationally, mainly addresses the unique attentive subject, the notion of le partage du sensible draws attention to the larger and shared context in which this event takes place. In the thesis, teaching as attention formation is addressed as a relational phenomenon in which the unique and irreplaceable subject is called into being and is given space to respond to the summons of the surrounding world and to strive against the materiality of that very same world. It is suggested that attention formation might be the educational event when someone, as a unique other, is called into presence and is given room to claim and to speak for his or her interest. It is an event made possible by those teachers who have the sensibility to discover its coming, the courage to let it happen, and the strength to accept the consequences of it.
We must now speak of the light, the absence of which renders the presentation of objects to the eyes useless. This light of the teaching art is attention, and by its means the learner can keep his mind from wandering and can take in everything that is put before him.

(Comenius, 1896, p. 339)

Expressions that sensibly translate movements in thought and nuance of feeling must be replaced by the direct relation between the forces of the soul and a certain number of material elements: the partitions among which individual lives are played out, the light that illuminates them, the doors and windows through which an individual senses the vibrations of the world coming to it.

(Rancière, 2011/2013, p. 117)
Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................... 5
ACADEMIC CONTEXT ............................................................................................. 9
INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................... 11
   A RELATIONAL TAKE ON ATTENTION AND EDUCATION ........................................ 12
   THE PURPOSE OF THE THESIS ........................................................................ 14
   CONDENSED DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND ITS AIMS .................................... 14
PART I: APPROACHING ATTENTION EDUCATIONALLY ...................................... 17
   1. MOTIVATING AND CONTEXTUALIZING THE STUDY ........................................ 19
      TEACHING AND ATTENTION IN THE 21ST CENTURY ........................................ 20
      ATTENTION IN THE EDUCATIONAL TRADITION ............................................. 22
         Attention as the Key to Educational Success .............................................. 23
         Attention as an Educational Goal ............................................................. 24
         Attention Slips Away from Education .................................................... 26
      TOWARD A CRITICAL RELATIONAL APPROACH TO EDUCATION ................ 27
         Three Domains of Educational Purpose .................................................. 30
         Attention in and Through the Educational Relation .................................... 32
      A RELATIONAL FRAMING OF THE ARGUMENT ........................................ 34
         Revisiting and Developing the Purpose .................................................... 35
      CONTRIBUTIONS TO EDUCATIONAL THINKING AND PRACTICE ............... 37
   2. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS ..................................................... 39
      PHILOSOPHIZING ON AND IN EDUCATION .................................................. 39
      PRAGMATISM AS A SCIENTIFIC STARTING POINT ...................................... 40
      EDUCATIONAL THINKING AS METHOD .................................................... 42
      INTRODUCING RANCIÈRE AS AN EDUCATIONAL THINKER ......................... 43
      SELECTION OF LITERATURE IN RELATION TO THE PURPOSE .................... 45
      THESIS OVERVIEW ...................................................................................... 47
PART II: DEVELOPING THE EDUCATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF ATTENTION .......... 51
   3. ATTENTION, INATTENTION, AND SCHOOLWORK ....................................... 53
      ADHD ON THE RISE .................................................................................... 53
      ADHD AS A SCHOOL-SPECIFIC CONDITION ............................................. 54
      TOWARD AN ADVERBIAL DEFINITION OF ATTENTION ................................ 58
      CONSTRUCTIONS OF ATTENTION AND INATTENTION .............................. 59
         The Double Expansion of Attention .......................................................... 60
         School and the Information Society ........................................................... 62
         An Educational Reclaiming of Attention .................................................. 64
      APPROACHES TO ATTENTION IN EDUCATIONAL THEORY ....................... 66
         Attention as a Teacher-Specific Skill ........................................................ 68
         Exercising Attention to Increase Students’ Learning ................................. 70
         Attention in the Philosophy of Education ................................................ 72
4. TEACHING AND ATTENTION AS QUESTIONS FOR DIDAKTIK ......................................................... 85
TOWARD A DIDAKTIK APPROACH ......................................................................................... 86
Teaching Slips Away from Education ............................................................................... 87
Teaching in, next to, and beyond the Didaktik Tradition ............................................... 89
Didaktik in the Swedish Context ...................................................................................... 91
Teaching from and through Difference ............................................................................. 92
TEACHING AT THE INTERSECTION OF DIDAKTIK AND PÄDAGOGIK ......................... 93
Teaching as a (Specific) Summons to Self-Activity ....................................................... 94
Teaching and the Notion of Bildsamkeit .......................................................................... 97
Attention as a Question for Didaktik ............................................................................... 98
CONCLUDING DISCUSSION ............................................................................................. 99
PART III: TEACHING AND ATTENTION WITH RANCIÈRE .................................................... 101
5. AN AESTHETIC APPROACH TO TEACHING ........................................................................ 103
THE POLITICAL SIDE OF EDUCATION .............................................................................. 104
Teaching: Sharpening the Definition with Rancière ....................................................... 106
SUBJECTIFICATION AND THE AESTHETIC SIDE OF EDUCATION .................................. 108
Rancière’s Pedagogical Paradox: Attention and Will ...................................................... 109
A Ranciérian Perspective on Teaching and Attention ...................................................... 112
CONCLUDING DISCUSSION ............................................................................................ 115
6. SUMMONING THE ATTENTIVE SUBJECT ........................................................................... 117
Fichte, Otherness and the Attentive Subject .................................................................... 118
The Summons and Uniqueness .......................................................................................... 120
The Double Summoning of an Ignorant Schoolmaster .................................................... 122
Intellectual Emancipation and the Relation of Wills ......................................................... 124
The Relation of Wills as an Attentive Relation ................................................................. 126
The Aesthetic Implications of the Relation of Wills .......................................................... 127
CONCLUDING DISCUSSION ............................................................................................. 131
7. THE AESTHETICS OF BILDSAMKEIT ................................................................................ 133
RELATIONAL INTERPRETATIONS OF BILDSAMKEIT ..................................................... 135
CURIOSITY ......................................................................................................................... 138
CURIOsITY, THE CONTENT, AND THE COMMUNITY ....................................................... 140
Translation as an Enactment of CuriOsiTY ...................................................................... 142
Rancière’s Aesthetic Bildsamkeit ....................................................................................... 144
CONCLUDING DISCUSSION ............................................................................................. 146
PART IV: TEACHING AS ATTENTION FORMATION .............................................................. 149
8. TEACHING AS ATTENTION FORMATION ............................................................................. 151
THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS ...................................................................................... 152
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Academic Context

This thesis is written within the context of the doctoral program Philosophical Studies of Pedagogical Relations\(^1\), which is a collaboration between Mälardalen University College (Professor Carl Anders Säfström), Stockholm University (Professor Sharon Todd), Södertörn University College (Professor Moira von Wright), and Luleå University of Technology (Professor Eva Alerby). The program, funded by Vetenskapsrådet and the universities mentioned, is situated within the field of philosophy of education and brings into focus the expanding concern with the relational aspects of education. As such, it delves into questions concerning ethical, political, aesthetic, and epistemological dimensions of teaching, learning, and educational environments. At the heart of this specialization is a focus on the conceptual aspects of educational relations and how they are theorized, practiced, and researched. It involves studies into key concepts, theoretical traditions, and alternative frameworks that inform current thinking on education. These challenges and complexities were put forth, in the application to establish the doctoral program, as political, ethical and

\[^1\] Parts of this paragraph are taken and translated (from Swedish) from the application to establish the program that was submitted by the mentioned professors to Vetenskapsrådet in 2010.
phenomenological issues that seemed to have no rightful or at least no obvious place in contemporary educational research, especially regarding Sweden. The task for the doctoral program is to establish a forum that can tap into and become a part of international and scholarly discussions on educational relations. The doctoral program is formed as a school, in the true sense of the word, in that it gathers doctoral students and researchers with a common interest in the complexities and challenges posed by the relational traits of educational practices, experiences, and phenomena to enable the participants to discuss and share, on equal terms, their current research on the matter.

The significance of the philosophical studies aspect of the specialization lies in the attention that is paid to the twofold character of education as both a science and a field of practice. Three distinct sets of relationships between philosophy and educational research guide our approach: philosophizing about educational research, philosophizing as a form of educational research in its own right, and philosophizing in educational research. The educational relations aspect of the specialization provides a necessary focus for philosophical study and reflects current, intersecting themes within the field of philosophy of education, both in the Nordic context and on the international level. These themes, broadly conceived, bring to the fore the dynamic aspects of how educational knowledge is produced and disseminated and the meaning this has for the emergence of the human subject in its social, political, and environmental contexts. Furthermore, it highlights the intersubjective dynamics between teachers and students as well as the spatial and temporal relations between people and their environments. This thesis contributes to these discussions in that it both starts from and delves into the complexities and challenges posed by the relational traits of education.
Introduction:

In all activities of upbringing, it is both necessary and unavoidable that adults present to children the lives they live and the values they live them by. Children are thus taught fundamental lessons about becoming human within a specific structure—that of their own culture, a culture that supplants animal instinct-driven cognition. … The order and the structure to which the child’s attention is drawn through a process of “pointing out” is presented through the adults’ utterances. … The utterances convey not only the structure of the perceived world but at the same time they also present deliberately defined ways of life. They also form the basis for children’s ability to express their own will. (Mollenhauer, 2014, p. 19)

At all times, adults have presented or represented ways of living that in some way or another influence children’s actions. Mollenhauer (2014) suggests that “pointing out” is a fundamental educational act through which children’s attention is both directed and formed. To Mollenhauer, education is an unavoidable process simply because children are surrounded by adults who, in different ways, point out and embody different ways of living. These deliberate or nondeliberate acts of

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2 The thesis as a whole has in parts been developed from papers that have been presented and discussed at the philosophy of education networks at NERA 2012 (Rytzler, 2012) and NERA 2013 (Rytzler, 2013), the post-structural network at NERA 2015 (Rytzler, 2015), at INPE 2014 (Rytzler, 2014), and at the philosophy of education network at ECER 2016 (Rytzler, 2016a, 2016b).
pointing out not only draw children’s attention toward specific ways of living but also form the structure of this attention. By having their attention both structured and directed, children gain access to the world in which they then have the possibility to express their wills. Mollenhauer’s view on education is thus connected to the activities of making visible and pointing out to children that which adults regard as most important for the continuation of society and life in general. The result of this activity is predicated on the children’s reception of this presentation, that is, on their attention.

There is more to say about the relation between education as a practice of showing, or “pointing out”, and its relation to attention. At stake, and not explicitly developed in Mollenhauer’s conception of education, are the relational and plural aspects of showing and attention in relation to the becoming of a self-active subject. Although Mollenhauer brings forth the educational significance of the activity of showing, he frames this activity mainly from the perspective of the older generation of a specific culture. He thus underestimates both the relation between showing and observing and the asymmetric and contingent traits of educational relations. Children, as unique beings and as newcomers, bring with them a certain amount of unpredictability (see Arendt, 1961/2003; Masschelein & Simons, 2013; Biesta 2006, 2014; von Wright, 2000, 2012). Therefore they do not always structure the world according to the adults’ wishes. They also have the ability to point things out and thereby draw and form the attention of the adults. Rather than approaching education as the older generation’s hopes and aspirations for the younger generation, education can be said to emerge through the intersection between the intertwined and joint influence that the adult and the new generation have on each other’s ways of attending to and becoming in the world (see, e.g., Stiegler, 2010). Attention, from an educational perspective, is thus a relational affair.

A Relational Take on Attention and Education

Attention is often defined in the psychological literature as a set of cognitive or neurological processes (Parasuraman, 2000; Mole, 2011). However, the word attention is a noun derivate of the word attend,
which stems from the Latin word *attendere*. *Attendere* is formed from the prefix *ad-* (to) and *tendere* (stretch), and means the act of directing or turning toward, to stretch something toward something, to apply the mind to something, or to strive eagerly for something (Ayto, 1990/2005; Online Etymology Dictionary, 2016). *The Macmillian English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (2007) lists five main meanings for the word *attention*. It can refer to an interest that you give to something, the fact that you notice something, special care for someone or something, a way of standing straight (e.g., soldiers in the army), or showing love. By exploring the word’s etymological origins and its transformations into other languages, one finds other meanings, such as *waiting, reaching out, and caring* (Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, 1966; Ayto, 1990/2005). In *Webster’s New Dictionary of Synonyms* (1984), synonyms for *attention* are *study, concentration* and *application*. Many of the above mentioned meanings, connotations and derivations of *attention* point to meanings of attention that are connected to different qualitative ways of interacting with the surrounding world rather than to different cognitive or neurological processes.

While some voices from the psychological and cognitive sciences have called for a more general conception of what attention is or could be and what it means to be attentive (e.g., Mole, 2011; Arvidson, 2006; Toren, 2001; Ingold, 2001), this thesis addresses the link between education and attention by exploring teaching as a lived and relational practice that creates, forms, and shares attention. In the context of teaching, attention is connected to the acts of showing and observing (see, e.g., Herbart, 1908; James, 1899; Mollenhauer, 2014; Lewin, 2014; Caranfa, 2007, 2010a). As such, teaching can be seen as a complex of relations that emerges through the intersection of the intentions of the one who is showing and the one who is observing. In a teaching context, the phrase *Pay attention!* can be seen as an invitation to students to take their place in and engage with the world (see Lewin, 2014). The phrase does not have to be uttered; it can also be enacted through the actions carried out by the teacher (Ergas, 2015) or through the teaching material the teacher provides (Masschelein & Simons, 2013). As such, the phrase, or any other gesture calling for attention,
can be seen as an invitation to students to engage in transformative relations. The actual “paying attention” would then be to pursue those relations and to activate and explore the transformative potential of the teaching event. In that respect, teaching can be regarded as a practice of attention formation (c.f., Stiegler, 2010).

The Purpose of the Thesis

The purpose of the thesis is to put forth a notion of teaching as a practice of attention formation by investigating this practice as a relational and situation-specific activity that promotes, forms, and shares attention. In relation to this purpose I address the following question: In what way(s) can teaching be understood as an activity of attention formation?

Starting from this purpose, I will theoretically explore the relation between attention and the practice of teaching. In doing this I will also show that attention has educational dimensions that must be approached from within educational thinking and practice in order for the question of attention to be theoretically and practically meaningful in relation to the practice of teaching.

Condensed Description of the Study and its Aims

The thesis is an explorative study that, starting from a relational perspective on education, delves into the relation between attention and teaching. Theoretically, it leans on two closely related notions of education. Firstly, education is understood as a field of praxis, constituted by the relationship between the older and younger generations, specifically with regard to the older generation’s hopes, aspirations, and fears for the future (Mollenhauer, 2014; Dewey, 1916/1930; Schleiermacher in Uljens, 1998). Secondly, education is understood as a process of becoming human among other humans (see Arendt, 1961/2003; Biesta, 2006; von Wright, 2000; Säfström, 2005). In the thesis this intergenerational and interpersonal field of praxis will be looked upon as a practice of attention formation (c.f. Stiegler, 2010). The specific educational dimensions of attention formation brought to
the fore in the thesis are those that can be seen as responses to otherness and difference (see Biesta, 2014; Säfström, 2005; Todd, 2003).

Attention is approached within the context of the thesis as a qualitative dimension of the practice of teaching (see, e.g., Ingold, 2012; Masschelein & Simons, 2013). This means that the notion of attention is investigated with a specific focus on (a) its relation to educational relations that are formed in the context of teaching, (b) its function in these relations, and (c) its constitutive role for the event of teaching. The thesis draws on educational philosophy and theory, and special attention is paid to the educational, political, and aesthetic writings of Jacques Rancière. The thesis intends to contribute to general and public educational discourses as well as educational theory by framing the topic of attention as pivotal to educational thinking and praxis.
PART I: Approaching Attention Educationally
1. Motivating and Contextualizing the Study

This chapter outlines the motivation for and contextualization of the study in three steps. *Firstly*, I will briefly draw attention to contemporary societal and organizational trends where key terms such as economism, instrumentalism, and new public management have come to influence the ways schools and their practices are shaped (see, e.g., Doherty, 2007; Biesta, 2009; Pierce, 2013; Masschelein & Simons, 2013). These trends have caused a discursive shift, publicly as well as theoretically, that does not easily harmonize with certain relational understandings of educational practices (see, e.g., Biesta, 2004, 2009).

*Secondly*, by drawing on some examples from the history of educational thinking, I will connect the topic of attention to the (old) educational question of how to awaken, direct, and entertain students’ relations to themselves and to the surrounding world. *Thirdly*, I turn to the recent development in the philosophy of education, where there is a renewed focus on the significance of the relational traits of educational encounters and practices (see, e.g., Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004; Aspelin & Persson, 2011). Furthermore, from a *critical* relational perspective, educational practices cannot be means to fulfill goals that are defined outside of the practices themselves; rather, educational practices are a form of lived practice that aims at acknowledging the existence,
Motivating and Contextualizing the Study

maintenance, and bringing about of uniqueness, otherness, and freedom in interpersonal and intergenerational relations (see, e.g., Biesta, 2009, 2014). I will end the chapter by revisiting and developing the purpose from a critical relational perspective and discuss the study’s contribution to educational thinking and practice.

Teaching and Attention in the 21st Century

One of the many abilities of an experienced teacher is to pay attention to the unique situation and to the unique students in order to create an educational environment in which the attention of the students can be established, maintained, and directed (see, e.g., James, 1899; Herbart, 1908; Dewey, 1916/1930; van Manen, 1990). However, during the last 20 years the educational system has been influenced and shaped by the logics of economism and new public management (see, e.g., Pierce, 2013; Biesta, 2009; Säfström, Månsson, & Osman, 2014). These logics, in which accountability and measurability are key terms (see Biesta, 2009), seem to provide little or no room for a notion of teaching as a lived practice made up of unique relations and unique situations (Biesta, 1999; Säfström, 2005, 2011b) through which attention becomes an active element in educational activities (Rancière, 1991; Cornelissen, 2010; Masschelein & Simons, 2013). Rather, in this climate, the concerns for (students’ lack of) attention tend to point toward interventions that do not interfere with the expected learning outcomes of the curriculum or the time-frame given to reach those outcomes (see, e.g., Purdie, Hattie, & Carroll, 2002; Stiegler, 2010; Robinson, 2010; Lardizabal, 2012).

Teaching can be seen as one of the most stressful occupations (see, e.g., Beers, 2012). A teacher who sets out to fulfill the goals specified in the curriculum is constantly hounded by the fear of failing to reach the students in class, of not having enough time to cover the entire subject matter, and/or of having to deal with other things that do not concern the subject matter or the planned lesson. A telling example can be found in Jank and Meyer’s (1997) description of the difficulties that newly examined teachers have combining structured theoretical knowledge with messy educational practices. A more vivid and literary
example can be found in the book *Teacher Man* (McCourt, 2005). McCourt uses every trick in the book to get his students’ attention, as he realizes that what he learned in his teacher education had no practical use in the classrooms he worked in. Furthermore, in a time when media and popular culture, through the double-edged sword of ICT-technology, traverse the walls of the classroom, constantly competing for students’ attention, it has become an immensely stressful and sometimes seemingly impossible task to attract and retain students’ attention in the everyday world of teaching (see, e.g., Hayles, 2007; Stiegler, 2010; Robinson, 2010).

Even if we live in a society where accountability and measurability now impact almost every social and public arena, attention cannot be broken down to a set of measurable and controllable units (Mole, 2011; Ljungdalh, 2016). For instance, a silent and calm classroom does not necessarily indicate attentive students, and a loud and busy classroom does not have to indicate inattentive students. In relation to the practice of teaching, the question of attention is easily turned into a question of distraction (Ljungdalh, 2016). A negative definition of the term attention can be delineated from how attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is defined in *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). There, to be inattentive means to have a reduced ability to perform a specific set of activities, namely those connected to and constitutive of schoolwork. Purdie, Hattie, and Carrol (2002) examine how schools deal with attention deficits and note that concerns that have educational origins often seem to be transformed into medical and psychological concerns, therefore leading to medical rather than educational solutions. Furthermore, when attention disorders are dealt with mainly as behavioral, psychological, or medical challenges that call for behavioral, psychological, or medical solutions, the topic of attention is at risk of becoming detached from educational practice and thinking (see, e.g., Purdie, Hattie, & Carrol, 2002; Stiegler, 2010; Lardizabal, 2012; Pierce, 2013).
Attention in the Educational Tradition

One might say that education, as a relational and transformative practice, is connected per definition to the question of attention. In this section I turn to some paradigmatic educational examples and discussions from the history of educational thinking in order to present some different ways of approaching attention as an educational matter. These examples, taken from the tradition of educational thinking, are used to show how attention can be approached as something integral to educational activities, either as a quality stimulated by the teacher (e.g., James, 1899; Dewey, 1916/1930) or as a quality that emerges in the relation between a student and the subject matter (Herbart, 1908; Sobe, 2014; Masschelein & Simons, 2013).

In the beginning of this chapter it was stated, through Mollenhauer (2014), that all forms of upbringing concern how the older generation influences the younger generation through different practices of showing and pointing out (whether formal or informal). This view of education is supported by Caranfa (2010a) and Lewin (2014), who both turn to Plato’s allegory of the cave as a typical symbol for those notions of education in which education is considered a necessary means of enabling students, through the right attention, to pursue truth and beauty.

Two paradigmatic examples from the history of educational thinking are found in Plato’s Meno and Rousseau’s Émile, two texts that serve as material for understanding the particularities of educational relations and practices (see, e.g., Darling & Nordenbo, 2003; Todd, 2003; Olivier, 2012). In Meno, Socrates directs the attention of the slave, who realizes a mathematical truth by looking at a geometrical figure and answering questions. Simultaneously, Socrates directs the attention of Meno, who watches Socrates’ interaction with the slave and thereby realizes an educational “truth”—that knowledge always comes from inside and that a teacher is only needed to bring forth what already exists within the student. In Émile, Rousseau invents situations in a “natural” environment, where the child learns “directly” from Nature itself in order to grow into a rational subject. That is, Rousseau lets the
experience-based education of Émile form the attention of the reader of the book (see, e.g., Olivier, 2012).

Even though these two examples are often used in educational literature as examples of good pedagogy, there are other interpretations that problematize the quality of the educational relations they enact. For example, Rancière (1991) and Todd (2003) both show how Socrates hides his own educational agenda in a rather devious way and excludes both Meno and the slave from his own explanatory setup through which he tries to prove that anyone can learn anything by themselves. Rancière (1991) claims that Socrates, instead of showing Meno an educational truth, hides his true educational agenda while (involuntarily) exposing the very same agenda for the critical reader. Under Rancière’s interpretation, Socrates seems to involuntarily show that education as the practice of explication has more to do with distraction than with attention.

Attention as the Key to Educational Success

The two-layered act of showing, whether explicit (though not entirely revealing), as in Meno, or more implicit, as in Émile, bears with it an intention of something: something to change, something to happen, or something to be learned. This something could be seen as a representation, of the world or of some knowledge, leading to the question of how to direct students’ attention to that representation or knowledge. In the language of the curriculum we speak of subject matter, that which matters in the educational event—the matter of attention.

Perhaps one of the most characteristic situations in the everyday life of school is that of a teacher making an appeal for attention. From an educational perspective, attention is connected to the act of showing; as such, it has a relational dimension that involves the one who is showing, the one who is shown, and the object (whether thing, action, or concept) being shown. In James’s book Talks to Teachers on Psychology (1899), where he draws some conclusions concerning education from his theoretical work in psychology, Principles of Psychology (1890/1950), one chapter is devoted to teachers’
possibilities of getting attention from students. According to James (1899, pp. 100–101), a teacher should provide educational settings that stimulate students’ natural tendencies, tendencies that form an attentional disposition that does not have to be called upon. In his view, willed attention, unconnected to the content of the teaching, cannot last long and cannot lead to any meaningful learning. To James (1899), the content of the teaching (i.e., the subject matter) has to be the center of focus in order to provide an educational setting that stimulates and attracts the attention of students. In *Democracy and Education*, in a chapter devoted to the role of subject matter, John Dewey (1916/1930) approaches the relation between student and subject matter as something dependent on the educational environment, both the intellectual environment and the social environment, and he states that the only thing a teacher can do is create an environment to form desirable intellectual and emotional dispositions in the students. The subject matter therefore must be “organized in connection with direct practical centers of interest” (Dewey, 1916/1930, p. 216).

Two preliminary conclusions can be drawn from James’s (1899) and Dewey’s (1916/1930) thoughts on attention. First, the teacher cannot provoke or force attention from the students to make them learn anything. Second, the teacher needs to ensure that the educational environment, in itself, stimulates both spontaneous and voluntary attention. Summed up, the teacher must create relations of attention, which is only possible if a relation to what is being taught is created with and through the attention to and the attention of the students.

**Attention as an Educational Goal**

Attention need not be considered a mere prerequisite for learning or studying. Herbart (1908, 1896), one of the first systematic educational thinkers, makes students’ attention both the starting point and the actual working material for the practice of teaching. Furthermore, both Pestalozzi (Herbart, 1896) and Montessori (see Sobe, 2014) turn to the importance of attention as a center for both educational thinking and the practice of teaching. To Herbart (1896, pp. 137–138), the attentive relation between student and subject matter is of utmost importance:
Attention is nothing less than the very base material for educational praxis because it is the practice and training of attention that leads to the ultimate aims of education, which are the fostering of sympathy and knowledge. To Herbart (1896, pp.137–138; 1908, p. 155), the key to this is the activity of observation and its prerequisite of sense-perception. Working out his science of education, Herbart stresses the formation and development of students’ sense perception as the most important task for teachers because, according to him, it is through sense perception that both knowledge and sympathy can grow. To Herbart, the principle aim of education is morality, and thus every other educational question should be based, implicitly or explicitly, on this purpose (Herbart, 1908, p. 72). Herbart (1896, p. 283) realizes that his own understanding of educational praxis is incompatible with a certain kind of thinking influential at the time (i.e., the ideal and egocentric philosophies of Schelling, Kant, and Leibniz). In the great philosophical systems there seems to Herbart to be no room for educational relations because those systems isolate the ego from the world in such a way that an educator could have no chance to make an impact (Herbart, 1896, pp. 283–284). To Herbart, many of the concepts that stem from those great systems have no bearing on the notion of an educational relation, and he makes it his task to reformulate them in relation to educational praxis and experience. In his view, with morality as the highest aim of mankind, the chief project for education is the teaching of knowledge and sympathy through the fostering of apperception. Herbart develops his theory of attention from Pestalozzi’s thoughts on how humans developed through their sense perception (Herbart, 1908, pp. 14–15). This is also the case for Montessori’s pedagogy, where the child’s way of attending to objects is the main educational focus (Montessori, 1912/2004, pp. 153–160; Sobe, 2004). Attention is, for Montessori, according to Sobe (2004), an “analytic tool for describing a certain kind of human perception” and thus also “an object of reality that [can] be organized to act as the controlled expression of a free will” (Sobe, 2004, p. 284).
Attention Slips Away from Education

Although attention has been approached by many educational thinkers as a specific educational phenomenon that can be developed through close observation of and reflection on educational activities and through the practice of teaching itself (e.g., Pestalozzi, Herbart, Montessori, James, and Dewey), attention became regarded during the 19th and 20th century first and foremost as an object of study for the psychological, cognitive, and neurobiological sciences (Crary, 1999/2001; Parasuraman, 2000; Mole, 2011).

Ljungdalh (2016) studies the relation between attention and education, mainly focusing on the close relationship between the birth of the modern school in the late 19th century and what he calls “the pedagogy of voluntary attention”; a pedagogy that works in almost the opposite direction of James’ (1899) and Dewey’s (1916/1930) insights as it focuses on the training of an attention to things that do not call upon a spontaneous attention (Ljungdalh, 2016). This pedagogy was aimed at preparing children for the demands of the industrial economy. Through his examination of this pedagogy, Ljungdalh (2016) shows how the growing knowledge about attention was very much based on the study of children with “attention deficits.” Because knowledge of attention, from the 19th century onwards, largely grew out of the study of pathological forms of inattention, attention was increasingly framed as a medical or psychological concept and was defined in terms of the negation of inattention. During the 19th and 20th century the psychological sciences came to inform the educational sciences with regard to the question of how to awaken, direct, and manage the attention of students (see, e.g., Ljungdalh, 2016).

There are different explanations as to why attention is not generally discussed today as an educational aim but rather as an ability that students either possess or lack. One explanation has to do with the fact that the term attention has had a highly psychological connotation during the last 70 years and has been studied mainly as a set of cognitive or neurobiological processes (see Arvidson, 2006; Varela, Thompson,

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3 Notably, in Sweden during the first half of the 20th century, it was common to be a professor in both psychology and education, where education was often regarded as applied psychology in the service of state education and its public schools (Fransson & Lundgren, 2003).
& Rosch, 1999; Mole, 2011). Furthermore, since the beginning of the 20th century, psychological theories and terminologies have served as objective and scientific rationales for differentiating and evaluating individuals within the school system (Säfström, 2000, p. 59). However, as will be shown throughout the thesis, there are educational thinkers who approach attention as something more than just a cognitive or neurobiological process, who approach it as an integral part of educational activities and relations (see, e.g., Lewin, 2014; Ingold, 2012; Masschelein & Simons, 2013). By highlighting the relational and educational aspects of attention, these thinkers bring to the fore the topic of attention as a topic in and for education, and they thus develop educational issues that were initiated by Pestalozzi (Herbart, 1896), Montessori (1912/2004), Herbart (1896, 1908), James (1899), and Dewey (1916/1930), among others.

The problematic and challenging aspects of education as a relational phenomenon have been briefly touched upon through the preceding introductory discussion of Mollenhauer’s (2014) view of education and of Rancière’s (1991) and Todd’s (2003) critiques of Plato’s explanatory pedagogy. In the next section I will discuss these aspects in a more systematic way and connect them to a critical relational perspective on education. After that introduction of the critical relational perspective on education, the purpose of the current study will be developed further.

**Toward a Critical Relational Approach to Education**

If attention and its relation to education is one of the main themes of this dissertation, education as a relational phenomenon is another. Following a recent strand of critical pedagogy, a special interest in the relational traits of education has arisen as a result of neo-pragmatic, post-structural, and feminist discussions that problematize the totalizing and ethnocentric pitfalls found within Enlightenment-framed conceptions of education, whether progressive or conservative (Biesta & Säfström, 2011; Biesta, 1999; Säfström, 2005; Säfström & Månsson, 2004; Todd, 2003; Langmann, 2013; Ryther, 2014; Hjulström, 2014; Ceder, 2015; Hagström, 2015; Hållander, 2016). This revitalization of
the notion of the relation as an educational object of interest has made it possible to speak of the emergence of a fairly new subfield within the educational sciences in general and within the philosophy of education in particular. Bingham and Sidorkin (2004) talk about a pedagogy of relation, to which they associate educational philosophers and theorists who stress the relational traits of education. This pedagogy of relation draws on relational perspectives from the tradition of philosophical thinking (they mention Aristotle, Buber, Bakhtin, Gadamer, and Heidegger) and from educational theory (they mention Dewey, Freire, and Noddings). In a Manifesto of Relational Pedagogy, written by all authors of the anthology No Education Without Relation (Bingham & Sidorkin, Eds., 2004), the relation is brought to the fore as an epicenter for educational encounters and practices. In Sweden, Aspelin and Persson (2011) make a similar attempt by addressing a field they call relational education (relationell pedagogik in Swedish). To this field they associate a number of educational philosophers: Noddings, Biesta, Todd, Säfström, Løvlie, von Wright, and Sidorkin, to mention a few.

Many of the writers in the field of relational education stress the importance of not losing track of the ethical dimensions of education, and they also stress the inherent relational character of educational activities (see, e.g., Biesta, 1999; Todd, 2003; Säfström, 2005). By arguing against either educational perspectives that have a predetermined notion of subjectivity or goal-oriented pedagogies aimed at creating good relations through educational interventions, many of these writers highlight the unpredictable character of educational practices and how education itself is relational from the beginning (e.g., Biesta, 2014; Säfström, 2005; Todd, 2003, 2009).

The idea of education as a teleological process toward maturity and rationality is included in what can be referred to as an Enlightenment-based formulation of education (see Ryther, 2014, p. 35) where maturity, as the self-determination of a free and rational subject, can only be attained by first constraining that freedom (see Uljens, 1998). Usher and Edwards (1994) state that education is “the dutiful child of the Enlightenment and, as such, tends to uncritically accept a set of assumptions deriving from Enlightenment thought” (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 24). These assumptions contain ideas of “a certain kind of
subject who has the inherent potential to become self-motivated and self-directing, a rational subject capable of exercising individual agency” (Usher & Edwards, 1994, pp. 24–25). Education that is based on an Enlightenment-infused perspective on subjectivity will always be at risk of too rigidly framing or determining the subject (Usher & Edwards, 1994; Biesta, 1999; Biesta, 2006; Säfström & Månsson, 2004). However, Mollenhauer (2014) notes that much critique of this conception of education tends to focus on what he refers to as the dark side of the Enlightenment era. Mollenhauer’s argument is that, even if one criticizes conceptions of education that involve notions of subjectivity that are too constraining, it is hard to escape all notions of subjectivity entirely. Mollenhauer’s claim is based on his own discussions about the unavoidable and inherent relational and influential traits that make up education as an interpersonal phenomenon. However, these traits can be interpreted and understood differently. While Mollenhauer focuses on (the importance of not forgetting or neglecting) the influential aspects of educational relations, Biesta (2004, 2011) focuses on the relation itself as being the constitutive factor of educational processes and phenomena. He argues that an educational relation should be understood from its traits of difference (education made possible because of differences) instead of its traits of sameness (education made possible in spite of differences). To him, an educational relation springs from a gap that can never be bridged but nevertheless functions as the precondition for the educational dimension of the relation (Biesta, 2004). This relational turn is based on an understanding of education as a fundamentally uncertain practice with constantly changing means and ends. Even though Western thinking concerning the relation between humans and the world has gone through a shift from consciousness to intersubjectivity, this shift has been made within the very same tradition of deciding and defining an origin of subjectivity and has not led to a more problematizing approach to the constitution of subjects (Biesta, 1999). To escape this tradition, Biesta claims, one must think more radically about humans as relational beings by focusing on the gap that makes subjects different rather than focusing on what they have in common.
Biesta (2014) suggests in his later writings that one way of dealing with the consequences of acknowledging this gap would be to begin from a notion of a weak subjectivity that avoids any a priori definitions of the subject. However, the term *weak* can have a negative connotation, and I suggest that we speak of a contingent or emergent subjectivity instead. An emergent subjectivity can be seen as springing from the relation of a self and its surroundings (other people, the physical surroundings, or specific situations), and this self is therefore something that is constantly shaped and reshaped in and through this relation. Out of every situation, in every context, a subject has the possibility of emerging as a concrete other, which calls for an ethical response from those who witness and want to take responsibility for the possibility and the consequences of this emergence (Biesta, 2011; Säfström, 2005; Todd, 2003).

**Three Domains of Educational Purpose**

Although education has been put forth so far as a relational and intergenerational phenomenon, it could be useful to discuss what implications this has on a more concrete and practical level, especially in relation to the practice of teaching. In discussing the need for a reformulation of the purpose of education, Biesta (2009, 2014) suggests that one may speak of three general domains in which education functions, all of which should therefore also be of educational interest: the domain of socialization, the domain of qualification, and the domain of subjectification. The domain of socialization can be said to concern education as processes of identification and adaptation of identities and as the formation and reformation of groups (on both micro and macro levels). The domain of qualification concerns education as a means to acquire skills and knowledge that are supposed to meet the demands of a specific vocation or that have been identified as required for functioning in a specific societal context. The third domain, of subjectification, is the domain that concerns education as an event that can bring about emancipation. Emancipation, in these discussions, is understood as an event in which the unique (i.e., irreplaceable) subject is given space or takes space in order to speak with his or her own voice.
Because these domains overlap and are sometimes in conflict (Biesta, 2009), the practice of teaching will always face the challenge of having to deal, practically and theoretically, with these conflicts. The domains not only show the complexities of education from a functional aspect but also bring about more nuanced and challenging discussions about the different purposes of education, especially in relation to the complex and multi-dimensional practice of teaching. By acknowledging these domains, it becomes evident not only that research, policies, or theories directed toward teaching practice might miss crucial aspects of that practice if they are not explicit in terms of which one of these domains lies in focus but also that most educational questions have to do with different intersections of these domains. The main interest of the thesis lies in the overlapping section between the domain of subjectification and the domain of socialization and the tension between that overlapping section and the overlapping section of the domains of socialization and qualification.4

In recent years, a number of dissertations in Sweden have critically addressed the relational aspects of education and the challenges they pose to the practice of teaching and other educational practices. In relation to the focus on teaching in the present thesis, worth mentioning are Edling (2009), Frelin (2010), Langmann (2013), Ceder (2015), Olson (2015), and Hällander (2016), who all address and problematize the relational traits of the teaching practice, mainly by drawing on different post-structural and post-human perspectives. Edling (2009) problematizes developmental interpretations of educational processes (of ethics and justice) and, drawing on the ethics of Levinas and Kristeva, discusses how young students come to terms with social justice and responsibility in their interpersonal relationships as those relationships come about in an educational context. Frelin (2010) brings to the fore how a significant factor in successful teaching is the teachers’ relational competence. Langmann (2013) problematizes different pedagogies of tolerance as they come about in teaching practice. Her main contribution, from a relational perspective on

4 These tensions are related to the educational principles of summons to self-activity and Bildsamkeit (Uljens, 1998; Benner, 2005), which will be discussed in chapter four.
education and drawing on Derrida’s deconstructive method, is that a methodology of tolerance is problematic because it does not take into account the possibilities for the tolerating subject to come forth in the lived practice of teaching (Langmann, 2013). Drawing on different post-human perspectives, Ceder (2015) argues that even a critical relational perspective of education has anthropocentric tendencies that do not take into account the holistic ethics of being in the world. Therefore, Ceder suggests, education needs a new terminology that takes into account notions of being and becoming that mean something other than human being and becoming. According to Ceder, this post-human approach to education turns becoming into a bodily phenomenon of different life-forms that emerge in their active and relationally embedded practices. Olson (2015) explores how individual transformation can come about through the reading of fictional literature. Drawing on the writings of Murdoch, Olson explores the role of imagination, attention and unselfing in relation the transformative potential of fictional literature. Hållander (2016) draws on the works of Agamben and explores the ethical consequences and educational potential of testimonies that are brought into the context of teaching.

Attention in and Through the Educational Relation

A critical relational approach to education does not simply say that educational practices should be based on relations; rather, it implies that educational relations (such as those enacted in the practice of teaching) are constituted before the subjects (see, e.g., Biesta, 1999, 2011). Focusing on the relational traits of educational practices turns the focus toward different ways of attending that emerge and are formed through educational relations and events. In trying to resist any categorical or taken-for-granted definitions of the human subject, I set out to explore the notion of teaching as an activity that invites and forms attentive subjects. A relational approach to teaching is commensurable with a number of educational approaches to subjectivity that take into account the pluralistic, political, ethical, and corporeal dimensions of human being and becoming. These relational notions of subjectivity make it possible to approach educational practices, such as teaching, as
practices that bring about becoming, transformation, change, and growth without predefined definitions of subjectivity or identity that always carry with them potentially unethical interpretations and enactments of pedagogical actions and activities (see, e.g., Säfström, 2005; Säfström & Månsson, 2004; Todd, 2003; Biesta, 2006; von Wright, 2000). Acknowledging and accepting the consequences of the relational traits of educational practices is a way of admitting the dangers of the implementation of affirmative, uncritical, and idealistic notions of education in schools and teaching practices, which can involuntarily lead to all sorts of violations of the students’ integrity (see Todd, 2003; Benner, 2005; Langmann, 2013; von Wright, 2011). Understanding and taking into consideration the relational and unpredictable traits of education is also a way of acknowledging the unforeseeable and creative forms of living that can come into existence in the everyday life of teaching and learning (Masschelein & Simons, 2013; Säfström, 2011a, 2011b; Biesta, 2014).

From the paragraphs above it can be said that a radical relational perspective on education calls into question such conceptions of educational practice that only concern either social identification or transgenerational knowledge acquisition or, in the best cases, both. The relational perspective is also concerned with the possibilities for educational practices to acknowledge the freedom and the becoming of unique (i.e., irreplaceable) persons (Biesta, 2014; Säfström, 2005; Ryther, 2014). Questions of freedom and uniqueness become important if one believes that educational practice and thinking should take responsibility for otherness and difference—something that might get missed if one perceives education as only concerning socialization and knowledge acquisition. Acknowledging otherness and difference as essential characteristics of the educational relation can be done in various ways. It can be thought of in terms of a call from outside (Biesta, 2014), speech from the (completely) other (Todd, 2003), or the existential experience of difference (Säfström, 2005). All these perspectives define educational relations as educational if and only if they include the possibility to respond to and take responsibility for the other. Säfström (2011a) argues that it is this responsibility for the unique other that makes education into something more than mere
Motivating and Contextualizing the Study

schooling. Schooling is, to Säfström, an institutionalized practice in which a given social order is reconstructed without taking into (adequate) consideration the integrity of the unique subject.

A Relational Framing of the Argument

“Pay Attention!” What educational meaning does this phrase carry? From a critical stance it can be seen as an intervention through which a teacher asserts him- or herself as a speaker in front of the students, embodying the center of interest within the frame of the classroom (see, e.g., Lewin, 2014). It can also be seen as an invitation that encourages the students to take part in the ongoing educational activities or to engage in a world beyond the walls of the classroom. Lewin (2014) makes a distinction by using the different expressions *Pay attention!* and *Behold!* The latter phrase has a twofold meaning: on the one hand it is pointing toward something—an object, an idea, or an event—and on the other hand it is directed toward the one who should attend to that “something.” Understanding the phrase as a gesture of pointing something out to someone, it could also be seen as an invitation to that someone to become an attentive subject.

When uniqueness, difference, and freedom are made the central point of departure for educational relationality, then sensibility and responsibility for otherness become central aspects of the educational relation (Säfström, 2005; Todd, 2003). These aspects can be said to describe a specific form of attentiveness that is not based on understanding or intentionality, as it acknowledges the otherness of an unknown other (Todd, 2003). It is in and through these responses that the subjects of the educational situation are shaped and reshaped, where they come into being. Since the response cannot be just any response (as in a simple reaction) but must be a response initiated by and directed toward something or someone specific, it must also be an attentive response (see Todd, 2003, pp. 130–131). Furthermore, in order for these relations to be ethical and educational rather than just ethical, they must also contain an element of transformation. But in order for the relation between the self and its surroundings to be educative (i.e., transformative rather than adaptive), it has to be initiated by someone
or something that brings something new and unknown to the table (Todd, 2003; Biesta, 2011, 2014). Furthermore, educational relationships as a specific form of social relationships—often characterized by a striving toward learning some specific knowledge or toward some kind of teleological transformation—are also founded in the intentionality of (all) the subjects involved. In these relationships, the intentionality is of a more asymmetric character but is also oriented toward a sought-for transformation of the other.

In the introductory chapter, I discussed how Mollenhauer (2014) frames education mainly from the perspective of the older generation (in terms of attempting to reproduce a presumed-good social order) by underestimating the younger generation (by ignoring its possibility to bring something new that could change that very same order). Therefore, an ethical educational relationality has to consider both the actuality of the other and the potentiality of another other, i.e., the future other (see Björk & Uljens, 2009). What has to be taken under consideration is how to preserve ethicality in a sought-for transformation of the other. In my exploration of the relation between attention and teaching, teaching is thought of as a relational and unpredictable affair in the sense that it comes from the outside and brings something new and gives room for a transformative response by acknowledging both the other and the future or potential other.

Having presented the relational perspective on education and teaching, it is possible to frame the study as a critical relational investigation of the relation between attention and teaching. This will be further developed in the following paragraph.

Revisiting and Developing the Purpose

As was formulated in the beginning of the thesis, the purpose is to put forth a notion of teaching as a practice of attention formation by investigating this practice as a relational and situation-specific activity that promotes, forms, and shares attention. In relation to this purpose I address the following question: In what way(s) can teaching be understood as an activity of attention formation? From a radical relational perspective on education, this purpose can now be developed.
If the practice of teaching is understood as a practice of attention formation, it becomes a complex of imperative and intentional actions, events, and materials that in different ways invite students to engage with themselves, with each other, with the subject matter, and with the surrounding world.

The exploration of teaching as attention formation leads to two main questions. The first is connected to a notion of teaching as a complex of direct and indirect invitations to self-assertion and self-activity. The second is connected to a notion of teaching as the setting up of possibilities for growth and transformation through that self-activity. Both notions will be explored in a non-affirmative way, which means that they do not start from a particular notion of the self or a particular end for educational activities (see Benner, 2005; Biesta, 2014). This non-affirmative framing of the practice of teaching will be combined throughout the thesis with a relational notion of attention.

It will be shown how the formation of attention is an integral part of the practice of teaching and that understanding this practice as a highly relational activity implicates that attention cannot be approached as a fixed entity that students or children either have or can acquire. Rather, attention must be approached as a qualitative characteristic of the relation itself. It will be further shown that teaching, from a relational perspective, can be thought of as an activity that invites students to become attentive subjects and as an activity that forms their attention. As such, teaching creates a tension between the self-active student and the possible paths for this self-activity. This tension will be further elaborated through a discussion of the triadic relation between student, teacher, and subject matter. This relation will work as a starting ground and point of reference in relation to the notion of teaching as attention formation. By focusing on the relational aspects of teaching, each of the three nodes (student, teacher, and subject matter) will be approached as interdependent and impossible to isolate from one another. Teaching is thus seen as the event where they all come into play. From this perspective on teaching I will explore (a) the relation between attention and teaching as a summons to self-activity and (b) the relation between attention and self-formation.
The main thinker I will draw on in these investigations is Rancière. By turning to some key texts (Rancière, 1991, 1999, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2011/2013), I will show how the notion of education as attention formation can be kept within a radical relational perspective and how attention can be thought of as an educational phenomenon from within this perspective. By approaching attention in such a way, I hope to offer an alternative to ways of thinking about the relation between attention and education, where attention is seen as either a set of cognitive processes or a specific behavior and where both are considered to function more or less well in the performance of so-called “school work.”

**Contributions to Educational Thinking and Practice**

The thesis contributes to general and public educational discourses as well as to educational theory by deriving the question of attention from within a frame of educational thinking and praxis and, more specifically, from a relational understanding of the practice of teaching. As such, it is intended to contribute to theoretical research on education where attention is approached as first and foremost an educational phenomenon. The hope and aspiration connected to this educational framing of attention is to provide a countermovement to the worrying trend of an education system that has become shaped by the logics of instrumentalism and economism. In this system there seems to be no room for attention as a quality to be developed in the praxis of teaching and learning. My contribution to the public discourse of education is therefore to (re-)connect discussions of attention and teaching with educational praxis and thinking. My contribution to educational theory is therefore the exploration and investigation of the relation between teaching as attention formation and the tension between teaching as a summons to self-activity and teaching as a summons to self-transformation.

I will in the next chapter present how the study has been conducted and how the argument has taken its form by motivating my methodological considerations, presenting the main literature that is used in the overall study, and present the main structure of the thesis.
2. Methodological Considerations

The purpose of this chapter is to place the thesis in the academic context of educational philosophy. Specifically, I discuss the study’s scientific and theoretical status in relation to the field of educational philosophy and develop a notion of educational thinking. In the other half of the chapter, Rancière is introduced as an educational thinker. In the end I motivate my selection of literature and provide a structural overview of the thesis.

Philosophizing on and in Education

Following Blake, Smeyers, Smith, and Standish (2003) in their introductory chapter to *The Blackwell Guide to Philosophy of Education*, it is clear that there are not one but many philosophical approaches to education. The writers stress the importance of not letting the philosophy of education be a subdiscipline of philosophy because the philosophy of education is, rather, a field of “applied” philosophy. As such it can be seen as different ways of reflecting on, analyzing, and scrutinizing tacit understandings, conceptual knots, and complex phenomena within the broader field of the educational sciences. Thompson (2013, p. 290) describes educational–pedagogical reflection...
as a way of scrutinizing the scope of educational thoughts and practices. Educational philosophy should, in short, deal with educational questions rather than philosophical questions. However, and as Blake, Smeyers, Smith, and Standish (2003) note, some of the most important educational questions have been and are still matters of philosophical concern, so it is not as easy as it might seem to separate the fields. It is important, they claim, that educational philosophy not invent questions that do not have any bearing on other educational disciplines and that it not regard itself as a provider of more abstract and nuanced analyses than those already being made in those disciplines (Blake, Smeyers, Smith, & Standish, 2003).

This thesis is partly a work of educational philosophy inasmuch as it draws on some educational philosophers and their methodological approaches to education. However, the thesis can also be regarded as a work of educational theory (i.e., of Pädagogik/Didaktik), as it delves into questions rooted in the history of educational thinking and practice.

**Pragmatism as a Scientific Starting Point**

In line with the study’s relational approach and in order to keep an open notion of both attention and the attending and attentive subjects, I have let my inquiry be inspired by pragmatism. Pragmatism replaces ontology with lived experience by resisting any final and universal conceptual schemes of this experience (Rorty, 1982). Such schemes would lead to a fixed representation and understanding of the world, something that goes against nonteleological notions of educational practices in which newcomers always bring a new understanding and alteration of this “world.” From a pragmatic perspective, the task (and challenge) of the social sciences (including educational science) is to maintain a (scientific) discourse that is neither objectivistic nor relativistic (see Rorty, 1982; Bernstein, 1983; Cherryholmes, 1988) by focusing on a qualitative progress of society while it remains in the uncertain or contingent by not formulating or pointing toward a specific telos (Dewey, 1916/1930). Pragmatism is, according to Rorty (1982, p. 165), characterized by three features. It is based on *anti-essentialism*, meaning that it offers a vocabulary of practice. Pragmatism also turns
against the spectator theory of knowledge and the urge to “substitute theoria for phronesis” (Rorty, 1982, p. 164). This means that to the pragmatist there is no way of distinguishing between theoretical statements (what is true?) and practical statements (what to do?); thus the pragmatist escapes the old philosophical (and Humean) dichotomy between is and ought. Pragmatism can therefore be said to be based on metaphysical relativism (we cannot find a common ground for everything) rather than real relativism (anything goes). To Rorty, a philosophical grounding would not give us any practical answers and would thus be as useless in practice as a wheel that plays no part in the mechanism (Rorty, 1982, p. 167).

Bernstein (1983) highlights the importance of letting plural accounts of the world exist together, even if they are incompatible in terms of not fitting into the same logical grid. With the notion of incommensurability, Bernstein suggests that two incompatible accounts of the world can exist and together contribute to a better understanding of some special phenomenon of the world or some specific human practice.

The main contribution of the pragmatic viewpoint of the study is its rejection of the theory/practice dichotomy and its acknowledgment of coexisting accounts of the world. These features of pragmatism are especially suited for educational matters (see, e.g., von Wright, 2007; Säfström, 2007; Tornberg, 2007; Östman, 2007). By doing this, the study also rejects the notion of theory as some kind of foundational research and of empirical research as something that engages with the “real” world, something that, according to Thompson (2011), would result in theory being mere self-referential reflection separated from the world and empirical research being the provider of usable knowledge within the education system. Thompson draws on Adorno’s notion of thinking as an act(-ivity) that can change the world. Säfström (2005), drawing on Rorty (1982) and Bernstein (1983), describes pragmatism as a way of doing theory in praxis rather than creating a theory of praxis, and he therefore sees pragmatism as fruitful when it comes to the area of education. From a pragmatic standpoint, in order to develop educational theory through a philosophical investigation, any questions that are dealt with must not only address educational phenomena and
concepts but must also be formulated from within the fields of educational theory and praxis. The next paragraph complements the pragmatic viewpoint with the specific educational perspective of the current study.

Educational Thinking as Method

The educational question that the thesis evolves around is *In what way(s) can teaching be understood as an activity of attention formation?* The aim is neither to develop a full conceptual scheme of attention nor to define the meaning of attention within the confines of educational theory. Rather, the study aims to carefully (and philosophically) explore (a) those events of teaching where the attention of the subjects involved is at stake, (b) how attention can show itself as a phenomenon within and due to these events, and (c) how the context of an educational situation is part of the attention formed therein.

In their *Manifesto for Education*, Biesta and Säfström (2011) claim that educational science should stand next to education by both questioning it and participating in it. They thus make educational theorizing a part of education itself. This lies close to Säfström’s notion of pragmatism as a way of doing theory in praxis. Educational thinking and praxis are part of the same whole and therefore cannot be separated other than analytically. Furthermore, education as a phenomenon involves certain experiences of a pedagogical–practical kind that are hard to depict only by means of a hard-core scientific or exact analytical vocabulary (see Blake, Smeyers, Smith, & Standish, 2003). Van Manen (1990) states that education in itself bears an interest in and responsibility for the relation to the unique other and that educational theory should therefore orient itself toward this relation. The object of educational theory is therefore the unique and not the universal. To van Manen, educational uniqueness emerges from the field that is left behind when positivistic science has said all there is to be said about curricula, learning abilities, teaching outcomes, and so on. Masschelein (2010) talks about a poor pedagogy as a form of letting the gaze of the researcher be commanded by the specific and unique materiality of an educational context. He uses the analogy of walking through a
landscape and having to let oneself be commanded by its specific topology. The unique field, as in van Manen’s case, or the educational landscape, as in Masschelein’s case, is interpreted in the present exploration as the phenomenal incommensurability emerging from the triadic relations of teaching. The dissertation is, in that respect, an investigation of a certain way of thinking about the practice of teaching, rather than an investigation of the very same practice.

Taking the consequences of the pragmatic perspective and following the suggestions of Biesta and Säfström (2011), an educational approach to the relational complex (to paraphrase Dewey) of teaching refutes the notion of attention as merely a neutral cognitive ability usually ascribed to individuals and their ability to learn and approaches it as a lived event that starts and is formed in a state of contingency regarding who the attending subjects are (or may become), how the objects of the attending subjects are formed, and what the context is where the activity of attention is taking place. The pragmatic/educational question thus becomes: What are the consequences for educational thinking and praxis if the relation between teaching and attention is explored in such a manner? That is a question that will be returned to in the final section of the thesis.

**Introducing Rancière as an Educational Thinker**

The argument of the thesis will be supported mainly by readings of the French thinker Jacques Rancière. In the past ten years, a number of educational philosophers have taken an interest in his writings (e.g., Biesta, 2010; Säfström, 2010; Simons & Masschelein, 2010b; Lewis, 2012; Bingham, 2009; Ryther, 2014). Rancière’s work is vast and he has addressed various topics, such as sociology, history (see Davis, 2010), political philosophy (Rancière, 1999), and aesthetics (Rancière, 2011/2013). In addition, he has addressed the topic of education to which the book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* from 1991 is his most significant contribution (see, e.g., Bingham & Biesta, 2010; Simons & Masschelein, 2010b). In that book, Rancière recounts the story of the French teacher Joseph Jacotot, who, while living in exile, taught French to a group of Flemish-speaking students without himself knowing a
word of Flemish. From those very successful experiences, Jacotot realized that teaching successfully had more to do with promoting hard work and attention than being an expert in a specific subject matter. This realization made Jacotot develop a teaching method that he called universal teaching. Although seemingly successful, the method did not become very popular and was soon forgotten in the general discourse of education. When Rancière comments and elaborates on this story in an allegoric manner, he tries to give his own explanation as to why universal teaching did not last very long. Rancière’s answer lies in the institutional form of education, which is built around the necessity of experts explaining things to non-experts. In this institutional form, which is both based on and reproduces a hierarchy of intelligences, it is the teachers who need the students and not the other way around.

Rancière describes the method of Jacotot as a method that starts with the assumption of equality of intelligence between teachers and students. By assuming this equality, the relation established between the two is based on will and not intelligence. By verifying the assumption of equality in and through the teaching practice, it becomes possible to break with pre-given hierarchical and explanatory orders. This break is what Rancière calls intellectual emancipation. The order of explanation is not preserved for education only, Rancière writes, since all societal institutions are based on their need to be explained to the citizens. Rancière therefore sees universal teaching as an impossibility between citizens within a fictional (i.e., explained) society, as it can only be a matter between persons.

Rancière himself does not consider nor does he promote the method of Jacotot as a practical way of arranging education to guarantee emancipatory outcomes. Rather, he sees it as a way to philosophically understand the limitations and emancipatory possibilities of public schooling (Rancière, 2010, p. 14). The ideas expressed in The Ignorant Schoolmaster and other, more philosophical writings by Rancière have inspired a number of educational philosophers to think and to write about education in ways that do not fall into the trap of discussing education from conservative, liberal, or progressive perspectives. For example, Biesta (2010) and Säfström (2010, 2011b, 2014) both develop in interesting ways the idea of equality of intelligence and conclude that
emancipation should still be a valid and important educational purpose. Masschelein and Simons (2013) take a slightly different route and analyze the components of intellectual emancipation: work, attention, and will. These components, they claim, lie very close to their own notion of education, particularly school as a place for study. Bingham (2009) explores the peculiar logic of Rancière’s writings in relation to educational philosophy, while Lewis (2012) explores the aesthetic writings of Rancière in relation to his work on education.

In the context of this study, the main contributions of Rancière are his understanding of the relation between will and attention (elaborated through his notion of intellectual emancipation) and his notion of aesthetics as a partitioning of the sensible (see part III). Rancière’s own discussions and other educational thinkers’ reception of those discussions establish Rancière as an educational thinker. This Rancièrian approach to education contributes to educational theory in that it addresses some of the central characteristics of educational relations, namely education as a summons to self-activity and as the bringing about of transformation as well as emancipation (see chapter four).

**Selection of Literature in Relation to the Purpose**

Here follows a short presentation of the main works and texts used in the study and of how they are related to the main theoretical areas of the same. In developing the argument of the study, these works and texts will be brought together into a sort of conversation in order to support the argument and the perspective out of which the argument is construed. Following Langmann’s (2013) example, I do not set out to present a full literary investigation of a thinker (Rancière) or a complete conceptualization of a phenomenon (attention). Rather, I will support a philosophical educational argument by weaving together important educational texts, discussions, and ideas that all strongly resonate with the study’s relational perspective and its main focus on the relation between attention and teaching.

Concerning definitions of education, I stand close to notions found within the tradition of Pädagogik. Here, I have turned to Uljens (1998)
and his description of Benner’s praxeological notion of education, elaborated in Benner’s *Allgemeine Pädagogik* (Benner, 2015). As there is no translation of Benner’s book into Swedish or English, I have complemented Uljens’s reading of it with Benner’s shorter book, *Tekster till Dannelsefilosofi* (Benner, 2005), where he outlines his nonaffirmative notion of education. As Benner’s theory of education leans heavily on Fichte’s and Herbart’s works, I have also turned to their writings, especially to those parts where the principles *Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit* and *Bildsamkeit* are discussed (Fichte, 1795–6/2000; Herbart, 1896, 1908). It is in relation to those principles that further readings by Biesta (1999, 2009, 2014), Säfström (2005, 2010, 2011a, 2011b), and Todd (2003, 2009) have been done, as they actualize in their own terminologies the tension between those principles (i.e., between the integrity of the unique subject and the sought-for transformation of the very same subject). Regarding the practice of teaching, I start from a Didaktik perspective as it relates to the definition of education, derived from the abovementioned writers. Here, important contributors are Uljens (1997), Hopmann (1997), and Klafki (1997). Säfström (2011a) and Biesta (2014) complement the notion of teaching by adding political and aesthetic perspectives, drawing mainly from Rancière’s writings, which are also important for my own work (Rancière, 1999, 1991, 2006, 2010, 2011/2013). Inspirational works on this matter include Frelin (2010), Langmann (2013), Ryther (2014), Ceder (2015), and Hållander (2016). Concerning the critical relational perspective put forth in the overall study, I turn to relational thinkers who focus on the practice of teaching and its ways of dealing with otherness, difference, and uniqueness and its possibilities for bringing about emancipation. Important discussions in relation to this are to be found in Biesta (2014), Säfström (2011b), Todd (2003, 2009), Lewis (2012), and Rancière (1991, 2006).

The scientific attitude of the study is pragmatic in that it acknowledges the plurality and contingency of human relations and, based on this, addresses the relation between teaching and attention and explores the consequences for educational thinking and praxis. Inspired by Säfström’s (2005) readings of Rorty’s (1982) and Bernstein’s (1983) discussions on truth and knowledge, the pragmatic attitude of the study
is that of acknowledging the pluralistic status of both the epistemology and the lived experience of interpersonal actions and activities. Those discussions have been complemented by educational philosophers who stress the importance of approaching education educationally, which is with an open attitude toward the unpredictable characteristics of educational relations and practices (Biesta & Säfström, 2011; van Manen, 1990; Masschelein, 2010).

Following the relational perspective, I have focused on discussions that stress the relational character of attention. The following works have been important. Psychological, neurobiological, and cognitive perspectives on attention are to be found in James (1890/1950), Parasuraman (2000), and Mole (2011). More social and relational perspectives on attention are to be found in Varela, Thomson, and Rosch (1991), Crary (1999/2001), Hagner (2003), and Hayles (2007). There are a number of thinkers who address the relation between attention and education, both from within and outside of the philosophy of education. Main contributors to this study are Ljungdalh (2016), Stiegler (2010), Rancière (1991, 2006), Lewin (2014), Masschelein and Simons (2013), Noddings (1984, 2010), Todd (2003), and Lewis (2012).

**Thesis Overview**

The thesis is construed as an argumentative investigation. Instead of conducting the immense task of exploring the notion of attention in relation to education, it is rather an argument that stresses, in exploring the relation between attention and the practice of teaching, the educational significance of approaching both attention and the practice of teaching as relational and qualitative phenomena. The argument is divided, as is the thesis, into four major parts: one preparatory part, one problematizing part, one executing part, and one conclusive part. Here follows a short summary of each of the chapters in the thesis.
Part I - Approaching Attention Educationally

The preparation for the overall study is twofold. In chapter one I motivate and contextualize the study by drawing focus toward a discursive shift regarding education that does not easily harmonize with certain relational understandings of educational practices (see, e.g., Biesta, 2004, 2009). By drawing on both the educational tradition and a critical relational perspective on education, I revisit and develop the purpose of the thesis.

In chapter two I place the thesis in the academic context of educational philosophy and discuss the study’s scientific and theoretical status in relation to educational philosophy. From this discussion I go on to develop a notion of educational thinking.

Part II - Educational Dimensions of Attention

In this part, I do two things: First, I address the problematic relation between attention and school that emerges from within an educational paradigm that has been shaped by instrumentalism and medicalization. Second, I define a relational notion of teaching and situate this notion in the cross-section of Didaktik (focusing on teaching as a triadic relation between teachers, students, and content) and Pädagogik (focusing on education as a summons to self-activity and Bildsamkeit).

In the third chapter, Attention, Inattention, and School Work, I problematize behavioral and psychological approaches to attention that often turn educational concerns into medical concerns, and I suggest that there are educational approaches to attention that better inform educational thinking and practice. After presenting some contemporary educational research, mainly from the philosophy of education, in which attention is not first and foremost regarded as an expected behavior in the classroom or a specific cognitive ability but rather something that can be developed in and through educational activities, I situate my own approach in relation to this research.

In chapter four, Teaching and Attention as Questions for Didaktik, I aim to place the study within the fields of Didaktik and Pädagogik by showing how the capacity, activity, and formation of attention in themselves can be derived from nonaffirmative educational thinking. I
begin by introducing the Didaktik perspective of the study from which I then derive a theoretical notion of the practice of teaching. Then I present the educational principles Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit and Bildsamkeit and show how they can inform, by themselves and in relation to each other, the notion of teaching as attention formation. The main issue in the chapter is Benner’s claim (Benner, 2015), that both the principles must be taken into consideration in any theory that approaches education as a whole. This, it will be shown, also has implications for how to understand attention and attention formation within the context of teaching.

**Part III - Teaching and Attention with Rancière**

The executive part explores the practice of teaching as a practice of attention formation, mainly by drawing on Rancière’s notions of intellectual emancipation and aesthetics. This part consists of three philosophical investigations that are placed in one chapter each.

In chapter five, *An Aesthetic Approach to Teaching*, I present a notion of teaching as a lived and contingent practice. By starting from a Rancièrian perspective on education, it is shown how the political and aesthetic dimensions of an educational relation play a significant role in the becoming of (unique) attentive beings and the becoming of a world (of difference). Rancière’s discussions on education, aesthetics, and politics contribute to educational theory, as they enable a radical relational perspective on both teaching and attention.

In chapter six, *Summoning the Attentive Subject*, I explore teaching as a summoning of attentive subjects. There I delve into the significance and meaning of becoming an attentive subject in and through an educational relation, turning to Fichte’s notion of education as eine Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit. This notion is then elaborated through Rancière’s (1991) notion of intellectual emancipation, which brings an aesthetic/political understanding of educational relations in that it turns the focus from the subjects involved to the relation that they establish with the world they are exploring.

In chapter seven, *The Aesthetics of Bildsamkeit*, I highlight one attentive quality that is relevant from a relational perspective on
teaching and attention. Starting from the principle of *Bildsamkeit*, I elaborate on how the teaching event brings about or enacts a sensible realm that can produce an aesthetic/political *Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit* that works as an invitation or summons for both teachers and students to become attentive subjects. The educational significance of *curiosity* is drawn from Rancière (1991, 2008, 2011) and Lewis (2012), who both connect curiosity to a specific form of paying attention that is at work in the event of intellectual emancipation.

**Part IV - Teaching as Attention Formation**

The concluding part is divided into two chapters, chapters eight and nine. In chapter eight I conclude the results from part III and relate them to the discussions in part II. In chapter nine I provide a more reflective discussion in relation to the thesis as a whole and in relation to how it came together as a work of educational thinking.

In chapter eight, *Teaching as Attention Formation*, I return to the purpose of the thesis and its main questions in order to connect the philosophical investigations of part two with the preparatory discussions of part one. This is done as an attempt to bring the different inquiries together into a more holistic view of educational relations, in general, and of teaching as the formation of attentive subjects, in particular. Taking the consequences of the previous chapters—where teaching is explored (a) as an activity of calling attending subjects into presence, (b) as a set of specific relations between self and self, self and other, and self and world, and (c) as an aesthetic/political endeavor that brings about both attending subjects and attentive relations—I set out to lay down a concluding picture of teaching as attention formation. The chapter also provides a feminist critique and supplement to the main argument.

In the ninth chapter, *Toward an Aesthetics of Teaching*, I provide a concluding discussion of the overall project. Special attention is paid to the educational significance of the arguments put forth, especially in relation to the lived praxis of teaching.
PART II: Developing the Educational Dimensions of Attention
3. Attention, Inattention, and Schoolwork

What are the reasons for not being an attentive student? Since the birth of the modern school system, answers to this question have been shaped mostly by medical and psychological terminology (Ljungdalh, 2016). In this chapter I set out to do three things. First I problematize behavioral and psychological approaches to attention that turn educational concerns into medical concerns. Second, I look into other perspectives and notions of attention that better inform a relational understanding of attention. Third, I turn to educational theory in order to present educational notions of attention, where attention is not regarded first and foremost as an expected behavior in the classroom or a specific cognitive ability but rather as something that can be developed in and through educational relations. At the end of the chapter, I will specify my own theoretical contribution in relation to those perspectives.

ADHD on the Rise

Perhaps the most commonly known and discussed disorder in relation to students’ struggles with attention is ADHD, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. ADHD, as it is known today, made its entrance
in the revised version of the DSM-III that came out in 1987 (Lange, Reichl, Lange, Tucha, & Tucha, 2010). However, the disorder had existed in previous manuals under different names, such as ADD (DSM-III, 1980) and hyperkinetic impulse disorder (DSM-II, 1968) (Lange, Reichl, Lange, Tucha, & Tucha, 2010). The first example of a disorder similar to ADHD was presented in 1798, but the scientific origins of the disorder are often derived from British pediatrician Sir George Frederic Still’s lectures from 1902 (Lange, Reichl, Lange, Tucha, & Tucha, 2010). In these lectures, Still presented 20 observed cases in relation to which he discussed particular “psychical” conditions that were concerned with “an abnormal defect of moral control in children” (Lange, Reichl, Lange, Tucha, & Tucha, 2010, p. 244).

Until a few decades ago ADHD was a diagnosis used mainly in the United States and a few other countries such as Australia and Canada, but it has now become more prominent globally, at least in the Western countries (Conrad & Bergey, 2014). Since the first national survey on ADHD was conducted in the United States in 1997, the number of diagnoses made has increased by approximately 3% each year (CDC, 2016). Other countries show a similar trend. For example, statistics from Australia show that, within the group of children treated for psychological problems, the percentage of children labeled with ADHD rose from 0.8% to 14.7% between the periods 1990–1991 and 2008–2009 (Charles, Harrison, & Britt, 2011). Sweden is no exception regarding the increasing number of ADHD diagnoses (Swedish Agency for Health Technology Assessment and Assessment of Social Services, 2013).

ADHD as a School-Specific Condition

There are two systems for diagnosing ADHD, the World Health Organization’s international classification system, ICD 10, and the American Psychiatric Association’s DSM–5. They are quite similar in describing the symptoms, although the ICD 10 speaks of ADHD as a hyperkinetic disorder, acknowledging that, as the diagnosis is based on behavior, there is no need for any actual knowledge about the possible eventual psychological processes or neurobiological conditions that
produce the behavior (World Health Organization, 2016). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM–5), published by the American Psychiatric Association (2013), lists nine symptoms of inattention and nine symptoms of hyperactivity (and impulsivity) of which six of each must be displayed for a period longer than six months in order for children younger than 12 years to be properly diagnosed with ADHD. A majority of the symptoms are closely connected to unwanted behavior in a school environment, such as making careless mistakes in schoolwork, having difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or play activity, not following through on instructions and failing to finish schoolwork, avoiding or disliking tasks that require sustained mental effort (schoolwork/homework), losing things necessary for school assignments, and being easily distracted by extraneous stimuli.

It is notable that the symptoms identified as symptoms of inattention in the DSM–5 have such a strong connection to the term schoolwork, a term that is not defined in the text and that could mean any activity with a presumed educational purpose. Therefore, the manual seems to suggest that there is one specific form of work—schoolwork—which children either have or do not have problems doing. ADHD can thus be seen as a deficit that is the construct of a specific dysfunctional relation between an individual and a specific environment—namely, school (see, e.g., Purdie, Hattie, & Carroll, 2002). In relation to this it can be worth noting that, in France, where the DSM is not used, the number of ADHD diagnoses is under 0.5% (Wedge, 2015).

Ljungdalh (2016, p. 4) argues that, during the late 19th century, theoretical knowledge of attention was very much based on the study of children’s irregular behavior with regard to school performance. According to him, not only inattention but the theoretical concept of attention itself could be partly understood as embedded within those educational practices where inattention had become a problem.

Based on the above discussion it seems as if school, as an institution, may be constructing (and, in its modern form beginning in the 19th century, perhaps always has constructed) whole groups of
children who are thereby alienated from that very institution. Lardizabal (2012) summarizes the concern as follows:

We live in a time where children are no longer energetic, spontaneous, or creative, but instead they are labeled disruptive, problematic, and abnormal. This shift in language and social perception happened fairly quickly right under our noses, along with the rise of children being diagnosed and medicated for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. (Lardizabal, 2012, p. 164)

It is, for example, notable that a child born in December is more likely (30% higher probability) to receive an ADHD diagnosis than a child born in January; this indicates that exhibiting a behavior that deviates from one’s older peers’ behavior could be enough of a criterion for a child to have an increased risk of getting the diagnosis (according to a Canadian study performed by Morrow et al., 2012).

When schools deal with the problem of distraction, Pierce (2013) has noticed that they often do it within the frames of a new biomedical governance that has come to influence and to some extent even characterize the educational system. He argues that a growing focus on children’s predominantly neuropsychiatric disabilities can be seen as the result of an increasing instrumentalism that focuses on accountability and measurability. From his discussions, one can draw the conclusion that a growing focus on the different forms of attention deficits that either make students unable to pay (the right kind of) attention or hinder them from paying (full) attention is both a logical and practical consequence of an increasingly goal-oriented, detailed, and fixed curriculum. If the curriculum is fixed, it seems as if one has only to fix the (attention of the) students. The combination of a fixed and goal-oriented curriculum and the idea that distraction is an individual characteristic (whether or not the distraction is medically diagnosed) seems to disconnect the question of attention from educational thinking and praxis. It is no longer evident that it is the teacher’s job to keep the students attentive, since it is up to the children to pay attention (or to the parents to ensure that their children can pay attention) to what the teacher says and does (see, e.g., Purdie, Hattie, & Carroll, 2002). If they cannot, the teacher’s responsibility for this is not as clear as perhaps once suggested.
Svenaeus (2013) argues that, in recent years, adults have come to describe and understand children and their behavior, whether in school or elsewhere, in terms that are heavily influenced by psychiatry and neuroscience, both directly and indirectly. Svenaeus does not question whether ADHD has any neurological origins but notes that this and other types of attention deficit disorder are often addressed without their environmental, social, and contextual dependencies being taken into consideration. One reason for this, he argues, is a lack of awareness of how modern society seems to come with larger and more specified expectations on what is considered “correct” or “good” behavior. Rather than being a sign of a global demise of attention among youth, Conrad and Bergey (2014) connect the global trend of increasing ADHD diagnoses with the use of DSM diagnostic criteria over ICD criteria, the global pharmaceutical industry, easy Internet access to different checklists, advocacy groups, and the strong influence of Western psychiatry.

The immense effort expended on understanding and dealing with attention deficits is important, and from an educational perspective it becomes even more important. Purdie, Hattie, and Carroll (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of studies on different types of interventions aimed at dealing with ADHD-related school problems. They identified five broad types of interventions: pharmacological, behavioral, parental, educational, and multimodal. Their research indicated that pharmacological interventions were the most common; but even though pharmacological solutions often had an impact on student behavior, they had a lesser impact on educational outcomes. The writers suggest that we should give far more attention to educational interventions because they are more directed toward educational outcomes rather than toward expected student behavior. Evidently, the strongly medically and behaviorally biased focus on deficits that must be managed for children to behave “properly” or cope with the school environment may

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5 Although questions have been raised regarding the possible neurobiological origins of ADHD there is research where some possible origins are suggested. For example, Mathis, Savier, Bott, Clesse, Bevins, Sage-Ciocca, et al. (2014) did some experiments with genetically modified mice and found that hyperstimulation of the superior colliculus led to hyperactive behavior. However, and for obvious reasons, the experiments were not being made in an educational setting.
very well detract from the question of attention as an educational matter of utmost importance. It is important not to lose sight of attention as something to work with, not only from the outside but also from within educational thinking and praxis. I present below a notion of attention that focuses on the relation between a subject and the surrounding world. This notion will be used as a model in order to explore the possibilities for developing a notion of attention from within the narrower context of the teaching practice.

Toward An Adverbial Definition of Attention

The notion of attention as a complex of cognitive processes has been disputed during recent years by some researchers in the cognitive sciences. They call for a clarification of the underlying assumptions about that which is being researched, something that is often implicitly understood but seldom clarified in contemporary attention research (see, e.g., Mole, 2011; Arvidson, 2006; Toren, 2001; Ingold, 2001). What is at stake in that discussion is whether attention should be seen as a series or complex of cognitive processes or as a certain quality of the subject’s relation to the world (Mole, 2011). James, in his time, noticed the limits of a rationalistic and schematic description of attentional processes:

We must admit that the question of whether attention involve such a principle of spiritual activity or not is metaphysical as well as psychological, and is well worthy of all the pains we can bestow on its solution. It is in fact the pivotal question of metaphysics, the very hinge on which our picture of the world shall swing from materialism, fatalism, monism, towards spiritualism, freedom, pluralism—or else the other way. (James, 1890/1950, p. 448)

James understood that attention explored from within the confines of science and especially psychology would only produce a reduced understanding of the phenomenon, since the nature of scientific research leaves no room for metaphysical speculation. Crary describes the almost impossible task of framing attention only on strictly scientific grounds as follows:
The more one investigated, the more attention was shown to contain with itself the conditions for its own undoing—attentiveness was in fact continuous with states of distraction, reverie, dissociation, and trance. Attention finally could not coincide with a modern dream of autonomy. (Crary, 1999/2001, pp. 45–46)

Nevertheless, there is a metaphysical split, according to Mole (2011), that lingers in much of modern research on attention. This split is due to which question one asks first. The question “What is attention?” leads to a process-first view, through which attention is defined as either a cognitive process or a set of different cognitive processes. The question “How does attention come about?” focuses on tasks that are considered to be performed attentively, and it frames attention as an adverbial phenomenon (Mole, 2011). This metaphysical split is not always especially explicit, and it is one of several other aspects at risk of being overseen when results from psychological and neuro-scientific research are directly and uncritically translated into educational contexts, whether practical or theoretical (see, e.g., Geake, 2008). To perform a task attentively, Mole (2011) suggests, means that the agent should be performing the task with a certain understanding of the task and that the agent’s cognitive processes supporting this task should work in cognitive unison.

Following Mole’s suggestion of acknowledging these adverbial traits of attentive activities, there should be a way of defining from within educational practice and thinking that which would be regarded as attention as well as how it could be conceptualized. From a relational perspective it becomes important to construe a phenomenological account of attention from the interpersonal and intergenerational characteristics of education itself and from a notion of teaching as a practice of showing and observing. In the following paragraphs, I turn to some thinkers who discuss notions of attention that are more dependent on contextual and interpersonal dimensions and that are also connected to subjectivity and selfhood.

**Constructions of Attention and Inattention**

In the previous paragraphs it was shown that the question of attention deficits is closely linked to expectations about correct behavior in a
school setting. In this section I discuss the relation between the inflation of attention disorders and the information society. Due to the expansion of what is usually called the information society, where information and knowledge both have become more accessible and unforeseeably vast, the role of educational institutions are not as clear as once put forth (see, e.g., Hayles, 2007; Robinson, 2010). Since information and knowledge have become either commodities that circulate on an open market (see, e.g., David & Foray, 2002; Kauppinen, 2013) or freely accessible on the Internet (see, e.g., Kozma, 2008), the school can no longer be considered the only provider of information, knowledge, or wisdom. Thus, an important question regarding the purpose, form, and content of teaching in schools becomes that concerning what students should pay attention to, why they should do it, and how they should do it.

**The Double Expansion of Attention**

Crary (1999/2001) states that the modern notion of attention that grew out of psychological and philosophical inquiries, especially in relation to the expansion of audiovisual techniques from the mid-1850s onward, can be seen as a sign of reconfiguration of certain disciplinary mechanisms, such as education and labor. In his genealogical study of attention, *Suspensions of Perception* (1999/2001), Crary has identified a discontinuity regarding the development of a general understanding of attention. Before the 19th century, attention was often regarded as one of many mental faculties and was not considered more important than any of the others. During the latter half of the 19th century, however, attention gradually came to be of interest for “a broad social and cultural field, an interrelated social, economic, psychological, and philosophical issue central to the most powerful accounts of the nature of human subjectivity” (Crary 1999/2001, p. 21). Crary argues that this had to do with a growing awareness of how attention seemed to be grounded in the materiality of the body and could therefore be seen as being part of a “disciplinary regime of attentiveness” (p. 13), a regime emerging out of “new technological relations, social configurations, and economic imperatives” (p. 13). Following Crary’s arguments, one could say that the attentive observer could be seen as an incomplete subject or a
subject-in-becoming, where the specific becoming is embedded in a complex of sensational, epistemological, and aesthetic relations that all human beings are bound up in.

Hagner (2003) complements Crary’s genealogy of attention by adding that, at the beginning of the 19th century, attention had in fact become a central problem and challenge for both the forerunner to modern psychology, psychophysics, and the observational sciences in general. Furthermore, attention was considered a virtue and a means for self-experience, self-observation, and self-understanding. This meant that attention could be interpreted as both an outside phenomenon that shaped subjectivity and as an inherent capacity of the subject itself:

Around 1800, attention made us the masters of exploring ourselves and the world that surrounds us. Around 1900, the space between ourselves and the world was filled by apparatuses, instruments, technologies and all sorts of entertainment. In this situation, the destabilization of attention became an auto-therapeutic device. First formulated within the realm of psychophysics, the notion of free-floating attention was transformed into a cultural cipher. (Hagner, 2003, p. 686)

If attention no longer can be seen as a faculty of the human mind but now must be seen as a cultural cipher that is dependent on a technological space in which human beings are tightly bound up (Hagner, 2003) and that also contributes to the very formation of their subjectivities (Crary, 1999/2001), the relation between education and attention can no longer be framed as a question of directing a subject’s attention toward an object of the world, since attention is a relation between the subject and the world that shapes both the subject and the world. The delicate educational challenge has to do with people attending to the world differently. They perceive the world differently, and they want different things, depending on what they make out of themselves and of the world. Sobe (2004) writes that:

Popular fascination with attention—as disorder and deficit as well as asset and order—speaks to the construction of epistemological and ethical certainties. The old question of how can we know that we all see the same world is reinvigorated when individuals are understood as actively composing their perceptions, excluding certain things as they focus on a specific thing. (Sobe, 2014, p. 295–296)
The educational implications of Sobe’s remark point toward the question of how to construe a common ground for making the world accessible through students’ attention, where that attention is something more than (just) a faculty of the mind or a set of psychological or neuropsychological processes.

**School and the Information Society**

The inflation of diagnoses of ADHD and the discussions on the relation between education and attention deficits can be seen, in light of the discussion in the previous paragraphs, as one way of depicting the present state of the education system in the Western world. In the latter half of the 19th century, attention had become a central concept in discussions concerning the relation between humans and their surrounding world (Crary, 1999/2001). Furthermore, attention had regained in that period an interest within the psychological sciences, mainly due to the formation of the modern school system, which faced the challenge of “forming, correcting, managing, and directing children, who, within a school context, were considered (pathologically) inattentive” (Ljungdalh, 2016, p. 5). But school was not the only institution facing the challenge of attention. Crary (1999/2001) argues that “capitalist modernity has generated a constant re-creation of the conditions of sensory experience” (p. 13), which has embedded, especially vision, “in a pattern of adaptability to new technological relations, social configurations, and economic imperatives” (p. 13). Crary argues that it is in relation to this contextual and cultural regulation of attention that inattention becomes a problem, especially because attention and inattention are not opposites but, rather, different ways of describing places on a continuum of different states of being, which can be regarded as more or less attentive by and within these contexts and cultures.

Following Crary’s and Ljungdalh’s discussions, it becomes plausible to say that educational institutions face a huge challenge when it comes to motivating the specific content and forms of presenting that content. The challenge seems to become even more complex as the number of social, institutional, and economical arrangements
competing for people’s attention increases. According to Robinson (2010), the modern society first overwhelms the children with all sorts of media and then penalizes them for being distracted. He speaks of an outdated education system that is basically shaped around Enlightenment conceptions of the rational subject and industrialism, with its instrumental view of both the educational system and its purpose for society. To him, the rise in students being diagnosed with attention deficit disorders must be considered in relation to an educational system that was shaped in another socio-historical context. The solution Robinson suggests is a new paradigm-shift in the educational system, where the purpose of education must be rethought from the ground up. He stresses the importance of an educational paradigm that promotes and develops different ways of thinking (he discusses the importance of developing creative and lateral thinking) rather than presenting a number of facts to be learned according to a rigid set of standards.

Hayles (2007) asks whether modern society, with its digital and information-loaded infrastructures, is in need of new attentional skills and whether that should be acknowledged in the educational system. In a society where it is increasingly important to be able to detect and select relevant pieces of information, as “just” information or as material for further inquiries, Hayles thinks that hyperattention has now become a necessary ability, an ability characterized by quick overviews, effective zooming in on relevant data, and swift selectivity among many pieces of information. A person occupied by flight control, who monitors data regarding several flights and focuses on their relevance for the actual airspace, would be a person with highly developed hyperattention. Since an increasing number of professions seem to involve tasks that require similar abilities, Hayles believes that these abilities should be especially trained in school, since the type of attention more often associated with school work is deep attention, or concentration on a singular task for a long period. A further challenge, according to Hayles, is to discover, in the educational context, a possible bridge between deep attention and hyperattention because a combination of the two would suit the challenges of the information society.
An Educational Reclaiming of Attention

Robinson (2010) and Hayles (2007) discuss how educational practices should develop new methods for letting students engage with the subject matter and the surrounding world, either through the promotion of lateral/creative thinking (Robinson, 2010) or through finding a balance between hyper- and deep attention (Hayles, 2007). The French philosopher Stiegler (2010) takes a different route by problematizing notions of attention that do not take into consideration the educational origins of the notion, especially in relation to the specific purposes, forms, and content of education itself. Stiegler starts his line of argument by commenting on Hayles’s (2007) distinction between hyper- and deep attention. Stiegler (2010) says that, although Hayles stresses the importance of education developing both hyper- and deep attention, she fails to acknowledge the formation of attention as essentially educational. According to Stiegler, education must take responsibility for its function as an attention former because education, as the link between the generations, is the guarantee for the accumulative intelligence of the collective; education is what should care for the maturation of society. Attention is therefore neither a capacity one brings into education nor something that can be developed as a neutral capacity that could then be applied in different educational activities. The attention to be developed is always an attention to something and must therefore be regarded as a relation with more or less educational significance. Stiegler (2010) claims that education in itself forms a specific attention in setting up and promoting relations between students and subject matter:

The work of constituting the transindividual involves the formulation of a transindividuation process that cares not just for language but for things, allowing us not just to designate them but to think them, to make them appear, and finally give them their place—by giving them meaning. (Stiegler, 2010, pp. 21–22)

Drawing on Kant’s idea of enlightenment as a process of maturity, Stiegler describes attention formation as the formation of public reason, something that is the result of reading and writing. Stiegler’s critique against modern society is that the adult generation seems to have
abdicated its responsibility for the minors by turning attention formation into a technological process that “short circuits” the intergenerational communication that should be the core of educational institutions, practices, and encounters. Education, to Stiegler, is a *Pharmakon*, both a poison and a cure; it forms attention but can also destroy attention. Education should therefore be seen as *meta-care* that is in need of a psychopolitics that understands and can manage the psychotechnologies of our time. Caring then becomes caring for the mental and the social attentiveness of the minors. Stiegler’s discussions focus on how to bring back the question of attention as a question of education rather than a question of the brain. He claims that if attention is understood without its connotations of caring and waiting, education could undermine its own role as an attention former, making room for other attention-forming technologies (i.e., ICTs) that, if mis- or overused, might short circuit the transindividuation processes that uphold and develop the collective intelligence of a society:

> Attention, always at the base of any care system, is formed in schools, but as a rational discipline of adoption inculcated into the psyche of the student-as-scholar (i.e., rationally adopting a knowledge or skill) before the entire literate world (initially, classmates). (Stiegler, 2010, p. 60)

Rather than discussing attention as an inherent trait of individuals within the educational system, Stiegler brings to the fore how that system forms attention in different ways, either through the relation between the generations and the relations between people (creating durable processes of maturation) or through unmediated relations between the neural synapses and information technology (short circuiting the very same processes and leading to the destruction of attention).

In the context of educational thinking, the words of Stiegler bring with them a strong sense of familiarity. For example, Schleiermacher’s (see Uljens, 1998), Dewey’s (1916/1930), Arendt’s (1961/2003), and Mollenhauer’s (2014) definitions of education are based on the relation between the generations. Furthermore, attention lies at the center of educational discussions in the works of Herbart (1908), Montessori (Sobe, 2014), and James (1899). Stiegler readdresses the educational
significance of attention through his observation that the formation of attention, as the most important factor of intergenerational communication, is at risk of disappearing as an issue for both the modern education system and the adult generation. However, Stiegler’s view on attention is infused by the Enlightenment perspective of education in that it is very normative when it comes to formulating the purpose and the means for reaching this purpose. Both Hayles (2007) and Stiegler (2010) turn to education as a means to develop either attentional skills that are needed in modern society (Hayles, 2007) or attentional practices that should not be forgotten (Stiegler, 2010). Using Biesta’s (2009) conceptualization of education, one could say that they mainly address the domains of qualification and socialization and leave the domain of subjectification out of the picture.

There is evidently more to say about the relation between attention and education, especially from a critical educational perspective. In the following, there will be presented some educational perspectives that focus on attention as an educational question, where the different understandings of attention are not medically or behaviorally framed and where there are discussions that make room for attention as an educational question that is important for all three domains of education. Particular focus will be on the philosophy of education, in which quite a few discussions on the relation between attention and education are relevant to the actual study.

**Approaches to Attention in Educational Theory**

The research that addresses the relation between education and attention is vast and manifold. In recent years, this type of research has focused mainly on inattention and specific deficits that cause this inattention. A search of the database Discovery on December 19, 2012, resulted in 1843 peer-reviewed, education-related (abstracts containing the term **education**) articles written since 2001 that contained the subject term **attention** in combination with **disorder(-s)**, **deficit(-s)**, **deficiency(-ies)**, **disability(-ies)**, and **difficulty(-ies)**. With the five last terms excluded (Boolean exclusion), the number of articles was 833. The ratio between deficiency-related and non-deficiency-related articles containing the
subject term attention was 2.2 to 1, an increase compared to the period 1981–1990, for which the same ratio was 0.95 to 1. A search of the educational research database ERIC on March 10, 2016, on the keyword attention together with keywords related to different attention deficit disorders was compared with the same search (also that day) of ERIC but excluding (Boolean exclusion) the extra keywords. The comparison revealed an interesting increase in the ratio between deficit-related and non-deficit-related articles. For the period 1969–1979 the ratio was 0.2 to 1; for 1980–1989 it was 0.7 to 1; for 1990–1991 it was 1.8 to 1; and for 2000–2009 it was 1.9 to 1. For the period 2010–2014 the ratio was 1.5 to 1, which indicates some evening out of the proportions revealed in the two categories of articles.6

In a meta-study conducted by Purdie, Hattie, and Carroll (2002, p. 86), it was shown that much of the educational research on inattention tends to produce medical answers to educational concerns. Most of the scientific articles (in the ERIC database) that address the relation between teaching and attention or between students and attention focus on different attention disabilities. Searching especially the term teachers produced 1047 articles in total between the years 1969 and 2015 and 235 articles with deficiency-related terms excluded. Searching especially students produced 1747 deficiency-related articles and 445 non-deficiency-related articles. In most of the latter, attention is put forth as a cognitive or perceptive ability of a singular subject, i.e., of the student or the teacher. The articles concerning teachers predominantly (156 out of 235) address how to manage or control the attention of students.

Attempting to delve into all articles and all research addressing attention as an educational phenomenon, question, or problem is beyond the scope of the overall study and also outside of its purpose. In the following overview of educational perspectives on teaching and attention I will focus, in line with the study’s purpose, on approaches to

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6 Fine-tuning the search on the ERIC database by adding the keywords teaching and teacher shows that the ratio between deficiency- and nondeficiency-related articles increased from 0.4:1 in the seventies, to 0.8:1 in the eighties, and to 3:1 in the nineties, to reach its highest value of 3.6:1 in the following decade.
attention that have an educational rather than a psychological or medical origin. These approaches have been organized as follows. First, attention will be discussed in relation to teachers and teaching. Then the relation between attention and learning will be discussed. Finally, I turn to the philosophy of education, where the focus will be on approaches relevant to the current study.

**Attention as a Teacher-Specific Skill**

One of the challenges of teaching is that of dealing with two types of sometimes simultaneous relations. On the one hand, a teacher is a representative of a certain subject matter that, in the act of teaching, is promoted, represented, or enacted as a thing in common between the teacher and the student. Bresler (2004), for example, talks in terms of the embodied knowledge of teachers. Davidson (2001, p. 88) talks about the triangulation of knowledge between teacher, student, and some mutual object of interest. On the other hand, the teacher is also engaged in the student, either directly or indirectly, through his or her engagement in the subject matter (see, e.g., Noddings, 2010). Ainley and Luntley (2007) identify attention as a specific teaching skill, but more in terms of a context-dependent attention to students’ relation to the subject matter than in terms of establishing an educational relation. Both these examples do, however, indicate a possibility of speaking of certain educational forms of attention.

Frelin (2010) concludes that the educational success of teachers is highly dependent on their conscious attention (in combination with rigorous work and delicate negotiation). By focusing on the educational relation as necessary but not given beforehand, Frelin makes attention into a central aspect in teaching, claiming that educational relations cannot be taken for granted but must be established and maintained. This establishing and maintaining of an educational relation is the result of a certain relational professionalism in which paying attention to the
specific features of a unique educational situation is an important factor.\textsuperscript{7}

A lesson can begin in many ways. In theory, it begins when the time on the clock coincides with the scheduled lesson time. In practice, it begins when the teacher receives or awakens the attention of (at least some of) the students. This is the usual conception of effective classroom management (see, e.g., Stensmo, 2008): a teacher balancing the tasks of controlling the students (getting/maintaining their attention) and coaching their learning processes (directing/focusing their attention).

Doyle (1977) has described three features of the teaching environment that teachers must deal with in their everyday teaching: multi-dimensionality, simultaneity, and unpredictability. Using an ecological approach, Doyle shows that a teacher can never do only one thing but must always keep track of several different things, operating in different dimensions within the classroom environment. If one concurs with Doyle’s description of the classroom environment, the teacher’s ability to pay attention to everything that is going on in the classroom is an important aspect of the teacher’s interactive planning, which is the constant reformulation of the teacher’s educational expectations in response to the students’ reactions to those expectations (see, e.g., Stensmo, 2008). However, this planning-in-action is always at risk of being one of the silent virtues of teaching—something that escapes any kind of formal training (Frelin, 2010). Hattie’s (2008) research, aimed at factors that have the greatest influence on student learning, also points to the importance of the teacher. Hattie has come up with the concept of the expert teacher as a key figure in students’ academic success (Hattie, 2008).

It is evident that the attention of the teacher is an important factor in successful teaching, but it is not evident what characterizes that attention. Some examples follow: Kounin (see Irving & Martin, 1982) has come up with the concept of withitness, which refers to a teacher-specific attention and is used to describe how well a teacher keeps track

\textsuperscript{7} Teaching is easily made into taking-care-of-business or surviving-the-day (or lesson), but, as the first Swedish professor of education, Bertil Hammer, noticed, education is such a practical business that its theoretical sides often are neglected. (Säfström, 1994)
of the activities of every student. Løvlie (2007a), referring to Herbart, talks about a certain educational tact that overcomes the theory–practice dichotomy. Exploring and expanding on Schoen’s notion of the reflective practitioner, van Manen (1990) also talks about a certain pedagogical tact as a form of embodied educational thinking. All these descriptions of the practice of teaching express in different vocabularies that there is some sort of teacher-specific attention, but they do not talk about that attention as something that can be shared with or taught to the students. This expert attention is framed as something exclusive to the one who teaches, namely the teacher.

**Exercising Attention to Increase Students’ Learning**

What kind of specific attention is at work in the process of learning? In relation to education, the most common forms of approaching learning are shaped around a variety of constructivist paradigms, which are more or less based on psychology and cognitivism (see Biesta, 2014). There are, however, some educationists that speak of learning in more educational terms. Luntley (2004) talks about learning as a gradually increasing repertoire of attentional skills. This repertoire is a set of skills that are based on couplings with the environment, rather than on the manipulation of linguistic items supposed to describe the environment. With this approach, Luntley aims to go beyond the traditional educational split between constructivist approaches, where learning is a theory-driven activity with the goal of understanding the world through our experiences, and sociocultural approaches, where learning springs from an urge to share our experiences of the world. Luntley suggests that learning instead springs from an urge to see the world aright. The statement “That’s a doll!” has nothing to do with the insertion of an experience in another network of explanations; to Luntley, it is merely a judgement of the world. Growing awareness, in the infant as well as in the expert teacher, is a form of apprenticeship in judgement and agency. Luntley talks of a seeing that is not driven by theory but rooted in a repertoire of attentional skills. This repertoire has the ability to transfer between different contexts (see also Ainley & Luntley, 2007).
Caranfa addresses the notion of attention in relation to education in three articles (Caranfa, 2007, 2010a, 2010b). Caranfa (2007) speaks of attention as an aesthetic sensibility that can be cultivated through the practice of solitude, something that is the result of a learning process. The learning subject cultivates this aesthetic sensibility through the exposure to art and other aesthetic and sensible experiences. Caranfa (2007) gives an example from Rousseau’s *Émile*, where the teacher exposes his student to different events in order to cultivate certain abilities or values. Caranfa (2010a) considers Plato and Weil, focusing on their discussions of attention as something that must be learned. To him, both Plato and Weil try to promote and find instructional ways to a contemplative life. To Weil, school study is a particularly effective means to the development of attention, but only if attention—not the knowledge with which the attention was concerned—is the main aim. To Weil, attention is not about using a “muscle” but about concentrating through the activities of looking, listening, and waiting (Caranfa 2010a). Both Caranfa and Luntley talk of the development of attention as mainly a learning process in which the role of the teacher is to expose the student to a segment of the world in order for the student to either see the world aright (Luntley, 2004) or cultivate an aesthetic sensibility (Caranfa, 2007). The teacher, then, is placed outside of the educational relation of attention formation.

In the previous paragraphs, it has been shown that the relation between attention and education can be approached in different ways. Attention can be thought of as something that is lacking in students, without being specially defined other than as an ability to perform schoolwork. Attention can also be discussed as a special skill for teachers to use to manage the ongoing class or as a specific educational tact, attuned to the relational aspects of teaching and learning and attuned to the contextual and situational dependency of the educational situation. While the discussions about students’ seemingly decreasing ability to pay attention and teachers’ attention as a specific skill or professional trait are interesting and call for further exploration, there are other perspectives from which the relation between education and attention can be explored. The abovementioned approaches all contribute to a more nuanced discussion of the phenomenon of attention.
in relation to teaching and learning; however, especially with regard to the purpose of the present study, they lack a critical perspective on the relational traits of education itself. From a more critical perspective, teaching and learning cannot easily be separated, and learning can be considered an integral part of teaching as a relational phenomenon that emerges from the triadic relation between teachers, students, and subject matter (see, e.g., Biesta, 2004). Within the philosophy of education there are quite a few approaches that come closer to a critical relational perspective on education in that they focus on attention as emerging in and through the educational relation.

**Attention in the Philosophy of Education**

When attention in the philosophy of education is addressed as an important aspect of educational practice, it is often done so as a way to complement psychologically and instrumentally biased educational research, where the focus is often on how to handle the increased incidence of attention deficits in the classroom or on how to manage the attention of students so that they reach the learning outcomes of the curriculum. (For a more thorough critique of this discourse, especially in relation to attention, see Tait, 2009; Robinson, 2010; Bradley, 2015; Ergas, 2015; and Pierce, 2013.)

One way of complementing that kind of research is by turning to the wisdom traditions, where the notion of *mindfulness* is connected to various practices that develop attention (see, e.g., Todd, 2015: Ergas, 2015; O’Donnell, 2015).

Furthermore, the relation between attention and education has been more explicitly discussed during the past years, mainly drawing on some of the writings of Weil (Caranfa, 2010a, 2010b; Roberts, 2011; Kristiansen, 2012; Lewin, 2014) or of Rancière (Simons & Masschelein, 2010a, 2010b; Lewis, 2012; Cornelissen, 2010). Most of the latter philosophers do not start from a psychological definition of attention. Rather, they draw on philosophy, scholastics, and etymology to define attention as an educational concept or to suggest how education could promote and develop attention as a practice (of being, learning, or studying). These approaches focus more on what signifies
an attentive activity rather than on how an attentional process works. Therefore, they are close to Mole’s (2011) notion of an adverbial approach to attention. With their educationally focused and adverbially framed notions of attention, they all stress the importance of cultivating an educational notion of attention.

In the following paragraphs, I intend to examine how the above philosophical approaches involve some slightly different understandings of attention, especially in relation to educational thinking and practice. I have categorized the approaches into two major groups: In one group, attention is discussed as an “outside” phenomenon that could or should be brought into education (either through the teachers’ own attentional skills or through the development of attention as a method for increasing learning or morality), and in the other group, attention is seen as a phenomenon that already has educational dimensions in that it is more of a shared or relational phenomenon. Both groups refute the notion of attention as an individual characteristic that students have more or less of, and both groups see attention as something that can be developed in and through educational practices. Ingold (2001), for instance, argues that education as an activity of showing or presenting is nothing more than an education of attention. In his view, educational practice should purposefully engage in setting up relations between a subject and the surrounding world, relations through which attention is formed and developed. Toren (2001) brings to the fore how the world is not given for growing children but, rather, becomes a world in the recursive act of seeing someone seeing them—a notion of education similar to Stiegler’s (2010) in that it highlights the relational and intergenerational traits of education and attention.

**Mindfulness as a Technique for Developing Attention**

Mindfulness can be described as a specific way of paying attention or of regulating and directing one’s attention to oneself and/or to the here and now of a present experience (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991). O’Donnell (2015) reflects on the current trend of implementing mindfulness programs in areas such as corporations, hospitals, and
schools. She and other critical voices question the instrumental and self-focused forms of many of these secular forms of mindfulness practice on the basis that they seem to have cut away both the ethical foundations of traditional practices and the ethical implications of their secular versions with too heavy a focus on the individual’s well-being and/or on mindfulness as a means to perform different tasks (such as schoolwork) more effectively (Ergas, 2015; O’Donnell, 2015). This critique does not come only from educational philosophers. For example, Varela (1992/1999) has expressed a similar critique:

Perhaps less obvious but even more strongly enjoined by the mindfulness/awareness tradition is that practices undertaken simply as self-improvement schemes will only strengthen the very egotism they are intended to dispel. (Varela 1992/1999, p. 74)

Connecting Varela’s critique with the earlier discussions on attention deficits, it would not be far-fetched to state that mindfulness could in fact represent a drug-free alternative to the management of attention (i.e., student behavior) within the classroom.

However, some philosophers of education highlight the possibilities of mindfulness techniques for their contribution to the development of an awareness of “basic goodness,” which they claim is lacking in the neoliberal educational system (Eppert, Vokey, Nguyen, & Bai, 2015). Other philosophers of education have addressed and problematized the notion of an evidence-based contemplative pedagogy by questioning its tendency to be immersed in instrumental and neoliberal paradigms of education (see, e.g., Ergas, 2015; O’Donnel, 2015; Hyland, 2015). Reveley (2015), referring to Stiegler’s discussion of the pharmakon-like characteristics of attention-forming technologies, sees mindfulness training as a double-edged sword.

In the next paragraph I turn to some ideas of attention formation in which it is considered a common affair for both the student and the teacher in relation to their shared experience of the subject matter or the surrounding world.
Developing Attention through Educational Relationality

Earlier was discussed how Stiegler (2010) criticizes educational institutions for not letting attention develop as a transgenerational practice. Furthermore, Stiegler stresses the importance of not losing sight of attention as both a form of caring and a form of waiting. His own solution to this problem is found in the practices of reading and writing, but he does not give any more specific answers than that. There are, however, some writers who have readdressed the importance of letting attention be developed through educational interventions and processes. The importance of caring has been brought to the fore by Noddings, and attention as a form of waiting is a central theme in the works of Weil. In Todd’s work, a notion of attentive listening is developed, and in Rancière’s work, the close relation between willing and attention is a central theme.

Caring

Buber (1970) defines humans as nothing but relational beings. Humans exist in and because of their relations to one another. Inspired by Buber, Noddings suggests (1984) that an educational relation should be based on or at least aim to become a caring relation, a relation between a one-caring and a cared-for. Aware of the twofold nature of these relations, Noddings suggests that the figure of one-caring meets the cared-for in what Buber calls an I–You relationship. Caring, to Noddings (1984, pp. 32–33), is a relation of feeling-with, a relation that is not infused or informed by knowledge but is rather about receiving the other. Caring is not an epistemic relation but more of an attitude based on ethics, receptivity, and concern.

To Noddings, a relational mode is per definition a receptive mode, an existentially influenced description where the relational mode is a state of “heightened awareness.” In her earlier writings, Noddings uses the concept of engrossment to describe the way in which the other is received by the one-caring in the caring relation. Engrossment is not intellectual, but neither is it purely emotional, says Noddings. There is an appropriate consciousness involved, but not in terms of rational objectivity. Engrossment has the characteristics of a feeling mode rather
than an emotional mode: “It is a thinking mode that moves the self toward the object. It swarms over the object, assimilates it. When this mode breaks down under pressure, we respond emotionally” (Noddings 1984, p. 33). In this quote the term engrossment is put forth as something that describes the relation between a self and an object in a way that the object influences the subject’s way of being; the object extends the subjectivity of the subject. In her later writings, Noddings displaces the term with receptive attention and, more recently, attention, although she sees the risk of the ethical implications of caring getting lost in more aesthetic descriptions concerning engagement with non-persons, such as animals, things, and ideas (Noddings, 2010).

Through Noddings (1984, 2010), one could see caring as the receiving part of attending (entendre), a receptivity that examines the object to be received openheartedly and intuitively. Caring is to make a move toward the concrete, rather than toward the abstract. That is to say that it is not based on a rational but on a feeling mode (Noddings, 1984). There is always a limit of the possibilities of education, and that limit is the same limit that hinders education from being an altogether mutual affair.

To Noddings (1984), a central question for education is how attention can be thought of in terms of the relation between the student and the subject matter. Noddings talks of engrossment as a form of displacement of motivation, of being seized, but she admits that teachers too often “quite naturally turn to proof, which is complete in itself, and away from the sort of demonstration that reveals our seeing; we rely on explanation and shy away from an obligation to induce understanding” (Noddings, 1984, p. 169).

Even if Noddings (1984) acknowledges the importance of teachers promoting an engrossment-like (i.e., attentive) attitude toward both the concrete and the abstract world, she separates this promoting and aestheticized act from the caring, i.e., ethical, act. By presupposing that caring is the foundation of ethics, she develops an almost intuitive understanding of attention, as she uses both attention and caring to describe a set of relations that is important for education.

In their respective discussions on caring as a specific form of attention that is often neglected in concrete school settings and in more
Attention, Inattention, and Schoolwork

general discussions concerning the purpose of education, both Noddings (1984) and Stiegler (2010) contrast the passive with the active dimensions of attending activities. Both Stiegler (2010) and Noddings (2010) criticize how education, too often, seems to promote certain active uses of attention, at least if those uses are promoted as instruments in order to focus on teacher activities (Noddings, 2010) or as special sorting functions of the brain/mind (Stiegler, 2010). Nodding’s notion of caring becomes a sort of attitude but also a practice, a specific way of attending—to oneself, to the other, and to the world—that has educational significance. The educational significance lies in the way the caring is a caring for both the other and the world, for the relation between the other and the world and for the relation between the generations. Through the discussions of Stiegler (2010) and Noddings (1984, 2010), education as attention formation can be understood as a way of caring (for oneself, for the other, and for the social) and a way of showing/promoting caring as a technique of paying attention (to oneself, to the other, and to the social). Caring thus becomes, on the one hand, a specific mode of being that turns the relationality of existence into a possible starting point for educational—that is, transformative and transgenerational—events and, on the other hand, a way of coping with those events without foreseeing or predicting their outcome. Caring is a form of engagement with the world that forms attention rather than directing a presumed attention or awakening a neglected attention. Caring places attention in the middle of the subject and the world, constituting a relation where the three components cannot be separated or independently understood.

**Listening**

Todd (2003) analyzes different modalities in educational relations using an ethical approach. She draws mainly on the writings on Levinas and tries, by adding a psychoanalytic layer, to formulate some possible traits of an ethical educational relation. To Todd, learning can always be regarded as a sort of violence to the (integrity of the) self, since the becoming of the subject is always the becoming of a social being, and the social is always what comes from outside and what demands
change. Todd, acknowledging these ethical challenges of education, tries to balance the notion of unconscious drives and fears in our relational selves and the notion of an existential being-for-the-other, which are both at stake in educational relations. With Levinas, our very being is constituted through the alterity of the other, but the writings of Freud show that there are also structures within us that are neither steeped in language nor fundamental domains of existence (Todd, 2003).

Acknowledging the violence inherent in all teaching—the violence as a part of the curriculum and the violence in the (self-)formation of the students—Todd investigates four modes of relationality: empathy, love, guilt, and listening. Empathy, read from a Levinasian perspective, will have a hard time escaping its egoistic traits, since putting oneself in the other’s shoes means replacing the other’s experiences with one’s own. Love is a relational mode that sometimes comes too close to the other. Guilt, on the other hand, might lose sight of the other if it is not seen as a fundamental domain of existence that emerges from meeting the other as other and bearing the suffering of the other. Having analyzed these modes of relationality, Todd ends up with an analysis of a certain type of listening that, to her, allows for an ethical response to the other that has educational significance. Todd acknowledges that the speech of the other carries with itself the person, and by openly listening to this speech, in the exteriority of meaning (in the saying rather than in the said), the other remains other, a person that exceeds any social category. Reflecting on the openness and unpredictability that come with this specific attentive listening, Todd writes:

Our responses to stories of suffering obligate us in a continual challenge to sustain and build upon the ethical possibilities that spring forth in surprising ways from our everyday contact with others. (Todd, 2003, p. 139)

With Todd, the passive receiving of the other is possible in a relational mode of pre-reflective listening. Her conclusion is that the ethical dimensions of educational relations are to be found in a passive receiving of the other. This is not an ignorant passivity but rather an active passivity, an attending (as paying attention) to the otherness of the other. What is meant by passivity here is that the relation is not
sought or forced. This passive receiving of the other becomes a way of attuning oneself to an inherent ethics that comes prior to the encounter. It is an attunement that enables the responsibility to be answered to, so to speak.

Although Todd mainly addresses social justice education, her analysis far exceeds that specific domain and is valid in most situations where the ethicality of an educational relation is at stake. What Todd brings to the fore are the risks and dangers that are inherent in educational relations. While Todd discusses the risks mainly from the perspective of the teacher’s ethical responsibilities, there are also dangers from the perspective of the one who is being taught.

**Waiting**

Roberts (2011) identifies attention as one of the fundamental concepts in Weil’s philosophy and presents some key features of this concept. First, attention is a negative effort that can resist the laws of gravity. Second, the development of this negative effort should be the ultimate goal in school studies. Third, the key term in this development is detachment, since it is when we withdraw from the things of the world that reality appears. Fourth, the training of this form of attention can be painful, and it is only endurable if the I is ruled out of the equation. Through his reading of Weil, Roberts (2011) claims that the development of attention is simultaneously epistemological and moral. Because withdrawal, selflessness, and affliction are necessary ingredients in Weil’s notion of school studies (Olson, 2012, 2015) as means to develop attention, the role of the teacher is important mainly because of the painful characteristics of the process (Tubbs, 2005). Tubbs describes the teacher as a slave to the truth emerging from the student’s relation to the task at hand or the specific subject matter. The teacher therefore becomes both master and servant in relation to the student and the student’s relation to the world.

Weil (2002) accepted that the self was formed in the intersection between our outer impressions and inner sensations, but she also aimed to renounce this self as it only stood in the way for the attainment of grace. In the very notion of the self, Weil saw a too fixed connection
between the world and the world as it was shown to me. Attention is not will, because it is connected to desire but without any accomplished goal in sight (thus a form of waiting). These desires must be deprived of their mental orientation. Appearance is what attracts and forms our attention and thus also what distracts us from paying attention to Being. Weil’s concept of attention has more to do with a readiness to receive without searching. The attentive subject thus must resist the desire to be active. Waiting is to Weil the essence of paying attention.

Under the above readings of Weil (Tubbs, 2005; Roberts, 2011), the teacher is a sort of role model as she goes through the difficult process of attention development herself. What is shared between the student and the teacher is some kind of common interest in attaining grace through the activity of studying.

Lewin (2014) complicates the relation between teaching and attention, drawing mainly on the writings of Weil, James, and Krishnamurti. By elaborating on the significant differences between the utterances Behold! and Pay attention!, Lewin shows how the paradoxical nature of the development of students’ attention can be seen as the ultimate challenge for teachers and educators. Understanding attention—following Weil’s writings on the matter—as a negative effort or as submitting oneself toward an unknown other, Lewin argues that the activity of paying attention within the frames of the classroom can be regarded as a gift from the student to the teacher. Because a gift must always be voluntary, the paradoxical nature of attention will always be a challenge for teachers and students, claims Lewin. Furthermore, since attention and teaching are both relational practices, they are both in need of a language that can encompass their respective nature of “being in between” (Lewin, 2014).

Willing

In Rancière’s writings on education, attention is also stressed, not in terms of how it should be developed, but rather in terms of its being a necessary component in the execution of what Rancière calls the “reasonable will” (Rancière, 1991, p. 82). With Rancière, teaching escapes the solitude of an attentive subject by being an activity of
shared attention, rather than a shared process of attention formation. Masschelein and Simons (2013) and Cornelissen (2010), in their discussions on the activity of studying, are inspired by Rancière’s way of defining attention. They argue that the activity of studying has been forgotten or has lost its significance in contemporary notions and discussions of the purpose and meaning of school and education. Lewis (2012) tries to develop Rancière’s notion of attention by elaborating on the significance of curiosity in relation to education and school studies.

One difference between Weil and Rancière is their respective way of connecting attention to gravity. With Weil, it is the attentive subject who, through negative efforts, resists gravity by falling upwards (Roberts, 2011); with Rancière, it is the teacher who shuts the door and lets things speak for themselves outside of the gravitational field of society (Cornelissen, 2010).

Considering the abovementioned attentional modes—caring, listening, waiting, and willing—it would be interesting to delve into the possibilities for educational practices such as teaching to cultivate and develop attention that is not framed as only a behavioral pattern aimed at performing schoolwork. In fact, Masschelein and Simons (2013), in their development of a specific notion of the school, add a new meaning to the term schoolwork. That meaning is infused with a relational approach to the practice of studying as a specific form of paying attention. In the next paragraph, I turn to the significance and specific role of the school as a possible place for attention formation.

The School as a Place for Attention Formation

To Masschelein (2011), who draws on etymology and scholastics, school is first and foremost a place of and for free time (a notion he derives from one of the different meanings of the Greek word scholē). The principle elements of the school are suspension, profanation, and attention. These elements are in turn connected to the experience of ability and possibility (Masschelein & Simons, 2013). School as a place of suspension means that it is a place that makes time free by allowing

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8 In Masschelein and Simons (2013), discipline and technique are added as fundamental elements of the school.
it to slow down and to be de-appropriated from its attachments to goal orientation and efficiency discourses. School as a place for profanation (drawing on Agamben’s use of the term) means that it is a place for the activity of making objects into common objects. Inspired by Arendt, Masschelein (2011) talks about having objects put on the table, making them into a thing in common. Attention is the third element and could be seen as the response to or the result of the activities of suspension and profanation as they connect the attending activity to both the self and the community. Here, the notion of a community becomes important, especially in relation to what Masschelein and Simons (2013) call the scholastic experience. This is something I will return to in chapter seven, where a Rancièrian notion of attention in relation to the principle of Bildsamkeit will be discussed.

**Concluding Discussion**

As shown in this chapter, the relation between education and attention can be approached from and understood in numerous ways. However, with a relational perspective on education and an adverbial and contextual notion of attention, it is possible to talk of an educational form of attention that emanates from and can also be developed in the practice of teaching. I began the chapter by problematizing the notion of schoolwork in relation to how ADHD can be defined as difficulties in performing schoolwork, thus disconnecting attention from schoolwork itself. By drawing on Mole’s (2011) notion of attention as an adverbial phenomenon and on Crary’s (1999/2001) and Hagners’ (2003) discussions of the way attention is formed both from the inside, by an attending subject, and from the outside, by an environment calling for and shaping the very same subject, it was possible to think of educational practices as specific environments in which attentive subjects could take form.

Important discussions on the relevance of reconnecting the question of attention to educational practices were found in Robinson

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9 In Foucault’s lectures on the hermeneutics of the subject, a similar notion is drawn from the practice of the care of the self, which is also a care for the community (Foucault, 1981–1982/2005).
(2010), Hayles (2007), and Stiegler (2010). Several discussions, mainly from the field of educational philosophy, also pointed in that direction (Ingold, 2002; Toren, 2002; Lewin, 2014; Masschelein & Simons, 2013; Cornelissen, 2010; Lewis, 2014; Ergas, 2015).

Starting from Noddings’s critique of attention as an active and often too instrumental way of relating to teachers and educational tasks, the notion of caring was put forth as a way of receiving the world and human beings from ethical and aesthetic points of view. The key term in these discussions was engrossment, a kind of relational being characterized by a displacement of motivation, a being seized by something or someone, a feeling mode that is neither emotional nor rational. The notion of caring as an interpersonal phenomenon was extended through Stiegler’s (2010) intergenerational notion of caring, where caring was put forth as the responsibility for oneself and the other, for the world and for the next generation. Stiegler’s discussion pointed toward education as the one institution that through care and waiting could foster an attention that had the ability to respond creatively to power/knowledge-structures that are always embedded in any social arrangement or in society as such.

What Todd (2003) brought to the fore were the risks and dangers that are always inherent in educational relations. While Todd discusses the risks mainly from the perspective of the teacher’s ethical responsibilities, there are also dangers from the perspective of the one being taught. The risks of teaching are due to both the ethical implications of the summoning and the ethical risks of the self-activity that the summons promotes. What Todd does is to bring forth the educational possibilities that lie in all encounters with the unknown and how they can be discovered if we are attuned and ready to listen to them. This listening is a listening that responds to the other. It is a gift, which is given at the risk of changing one’s self. It is an attending to attending, or an awakening to the presence of the other: an educational listening.

Evidently, in the field of educational philosophy there are several relationally infused accounts of attention. These accounts contribute to a more nuanced understanding of attention as an adverbial educational phenomenon that is both inherent in and possible to develop in educational practices. In most of the accounts there is, however, a sort
of separation between education as a process of study and/or learning and education as an interpersonal praxis with ethical implications. Furthermore, in several discussions where the importance of the relation is addressed, the importance of attention is often only implicit or derived from other relational modes of being, as in caring, waiting, and listening. Replacing attention with a more descriptive term can be fruitful in order to stress the relational traits of educational practice, but it can also contribute to a separation of closely related concepts that contributes to an unfertile split between educational psychology and educational philosophy (see, e.g., Bengtsson, 1997).

I intend this study to contribute to the ongoing and lively discussion about attention that takes place within the philosophy of education. In the following chapters I develop my own contribution to these educational and philosophical discussions by drawing the question of attention into the context of teaching, with a special focus on the transformative and emancipatory possibilities of the practice of teaching (Biesta, 2014; Säfström, 2005; Todd, 2015). I draw mainly on Rancière’s discussions of intellectual emancipation (Rancière, 1991, 2008, 2010, 2011), politics, and aesthetics (Rancière, 1999, 2006, 2011/2013). Before I turn to the writings of Rancière, I will in the next chapter develop a notion of teaching that is formulated in relation to the intersection of the traditions of Didaktik and Pädagogik. With this notion, the relational and educational dimensions of teaching come to the fore in a way that turns attention into a central question.
4. Teaching and Attention as Questions for Didaktik

In the previous chapter I motivated an educational reclaiming of attention by stressing its adverbial and relational characteristics. In this chapter I bring forth a notion of teaching in which these characteristics are given a specific educational significance. In the lived practice of teaching, all aspects and challenges of education come together in such a complex and messy whole that their theoretical, historical, and conceptual foundations are easily forgotten, neglected, or just practically ruled out of the picture (see Säfström, 1994). In previous chapters it has been argued that the forming and fostering of attention is an integral part of teaching and that teaching is a highly relational activity. Attention is, from that perspective, not a fixed entity that students or children either have or can acquire, but something that is formed in the lived event of teaching. Thus the phrase *Pay attention!* becomes a kind of calling of the subject into presence (i.e., self-presence) that potentially constitutes the subject as a subject with its own history and future.

In this chapter I attempt to theoretically sharpen the picture of the practice of teaching in order to find therein an educationally significant meaning and place for attention and the formation of attention. In order
Teaching and Attention as Questions for Didaktik

to do so I turn to the intersection of the academic traditions of Pädagogik and Didaktik. The relation between attention and teaching is explored with a special focus on subjectivity and becoming as interpersonal and intergenerational categories with ethical dimensions. This turns the question of attention formation into a question of and for Pädagogik. Stiegler’s (2010) notion of attention formation as psychopolitics—a politics that not only manages and distributes knowledge but also manages how people relate to that knowledge (with vigilance or with care)—points toward the importance of paying close attention to (a) how knowledge is produced, (b) by whom it is produced, and (c) whom the knowledge is supposed to serve. This turns the question of attention formation into a question of and for Didaktik.

Toward a Didaktik Approach

How does the practice of teaching relate to education as a conceptual whole? Nordenbo (2002) refers to Pleines (1989), who argues that educational theory consists of three fundamental concepts: Bildung, Erziehung (upbringing), and Unterricht (teaching). These concepts are also what characterize three ages or historically embedded paradigms that still influence the modern conception of education today (Pleines, in Nordenbo, 2002).

The concept of Bildung is what characterized the Greek notion of education. While Bildung can be interpreted as both a process through which an individual reaches an educational telos and the end result of that process, in Greek culture Bildung was the process through which a harmonic balance was reached between the individual and the city-state (i.e., paidiea). The concept of Erziehung was what characterized education as it was motivated through the relation between church and school in the medieval era, where education was the process through which individuals were supposed to be purified from their sins. The third age of education is the age of teaching, where the focus was to educate the uneducated in necessary knowledge and skills. It was through Rousseau’s critique against the Christian framing of education that the Unterricht era of education began. According to Nordenbo,
Rousseau was the first person to include the purpose of education in educational theory, which until then was only interested in discussing and developing means for reaching unquestioned aims. Arfwedson (1998, p. 57) argues that Rousseau is one of the first educational thinkers to put the integrity of the unique child at the center of the purpose of education.

**Teaching Slips Away from Education**

One could say that teaching, especially in its institutional forms, is always at risk of falling into the trap of instrumentalism, especially if teaching is not understood from within a paradigm that both builds on and includes the other paradigms of education, *Bildung* and *Erziehung*. One consequence of an instrumental approach to teaching is that students and teachers are at risk of becoming detached from each other and defined only from their function and/or purpose in a particular educational context or system (i.e., the teacher is supposed to teach in order for the student to learn). In educational institutions shaped or influenced by economism and new public management ideals, students have come to be regarded as consumers/learners, whereas teachers have come to be regarded as administrators/learning facilitators (Biesta, 2009; Säfström, Månsson, & Osman, 2015). This discursive shift, alongside a general tendency to base educational policies on constructivist ideals and certain postmodern critiques of the enlightenment project, has led to a gradual abandonment of the term “teaching” in favor of the term “learning” (Biesta, 2009, 2014).

To Biesta (2014), the constructivist paradigms tend to focus on either how individuals construct their own knowledge or how groups of individuals socially construct knowledge. In these paradigms, the role of the teacher becomes problematic because a teacher cannot provide knowledge but should only see to it that students can construct knowledge by themselves (teacher as learning facilitator). Biesta notes that, from a postmodern or post-structural critique of the Enlightenment project, the role of the teacher also becomes problematic because it signifies or impersonates the figure of power that upholds and asserts power/knowledge structures and taken-for-granted perspectives of the
world and of the human subject that, together, work against possibilities for emancipation.

When teaching no longer seems to have any rightful place in either educational theory or educational institutions, the only thing left to talk about is learning, where learning is often tacitly understood as a process of acquiring a certain knowledge defined by a certain curriculum and provided or made accessible by a certain teacher or by the learning material and this for the (sole) purpose of reaching certain key competences that have been nationally or globally ratified (see Säfström, Månsson, & Osman, 2015; Biesta, 2009). Biesta (2009) has stated that this growing focus on the individual learner can be found, though based on different grounds, in liberal, conservative, and progressive conceptions of education. They only seem to differ with regard to what the central knowledge should be and through which methods it should be learned.

The importance of the teacher in terms of skills, abilities, and ethics has been highlighted in later years through, for example, Darling-Hammond (2006) and her stressing of the complexities of the teacher profession, Hattie (2008) and his notion of the expert teacher and Hansen (1995) and his notion of teaching as a vocation or a moral calling. Whether this renewed interest in the significant impact of the teacher is depicted in terms of professional skills (Hattie, 2008), social values and personal meaning (Hansen, 1995), or both (Darling-Hammond, 2006) the main task for the teacher—within the heavily influential instrumental and economist paradigms—is not to teach, but rather to coach students or facilitate their learning processes, with academic achievement as the main (or only) goal (Biesta, 2009, 2014). This is not to say that those tasks are unimportant aspects of the practice of teaching. However, in the context of the current study, teaching signifies something more than being an adverbial enactment on the part of the teacher, whether in terms of professional skills, personal traits, or an embodied ethos. Rather, it signifies and builds on the triangulation of the paradigms of teaching, Bildung, and Erziehung.
Teaching and Attention as Questions for Didaktik

The relational and contextual aspects of teaching come to the fore if teaching is regarded as a triadic relation between three figures—the student, the teacher, and the content (e.g., a specific subject matter or a way of living). As such, the practice of teaching turns into an object of study, close to that which lies at the center of the German Didaktik tradition (Hopmann, 1997; Uljens, 1997; Klafki, 1997; Arfwedson, 1998).

The German word Didaktik can be derived from the root of the Greek word “to show” (Hopmann, 1997). Thus it has etymological connections to the question of attention as different ways of relating to that which is shown. Uljens (1997) describes Didaktik as both a science and a praxis that deals with questions regarding what should be taught, why it should be taught, to whom it should be taught, and how it should be taught. In this tradition, the teacher is not merely someone who should implement goals stated in the curriculum or other educational goals but someone who has the ability to and should critically evaluate those goals from within the unique educational setting where the teaching takes place, putting them into action and having responsibility for both the subject matter and the integrity of students. With the notion of Erziehender Unterricht, Herbart called attention to how the teacher not only executes educational interventions but is also part of the teaching process in a way that avoids the classical “teacher teaches and students learn” framing of the activity (Hopmann, 1997). As stated in chapter one, Herbart stressed the importance of teaching aiming at both knowledge and sympathy, both of which should be developed through the training of attention. In Herbart and the Didaktik tradition that followed, educational questions must take into consideration the relational dimensions of teaching practice.

In the Didaktik tradition, to which Blankertz, Hopmann, Klafki, Jank, and Mayer are significant contributors (see Uljens, 1997), the teacher is only one parameter, as is the student, and both in relation to the content, form, and purpose of the subject matter. Hopmann (1997)

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10 The Swedish word for teaching is undervisning, which also is connected to the verb “to show.”
notes that different traditions stress differently the importance of the three main relations of the triad, the communicative relation of teacher and students, the representational relation of teacher and subject matter, and the experiential relation of students and subject matter (see also Künzli, 1998). However, common to most Didaktik approaches is the notion of teaching as formation through a shared engagement with the subject matter (Hopmann, 1997, p. 207; Künzli, 1998, p. 39). According to Kansanen, Hansén, Sjöberg, and Kroksmark (2011, p. 44), the substance of Didaktik is the teaching process, with all its related elements and circumstances. As such, teaching constitutes a totality within a specific social context. Specific to modern German Didaktik, according to Westbury, is that it seeks to model forms of teacher thinking that might direct the teacher to systematic hermeneutic reflection about ways in which classroom environments might support a personal subjective encounter, or relationship, with the educative “content” represented in the curriculum, the ultimate forms of social life, and the like. (Westbury, 1998, p. 57)

It is thus hard to make a clear conceptual distinction between Didaktik and Pädagogik. Whereas the former can be said to focus on every possible interpersonal and intergenerational process of growth, change, or transformation, the latter can be said to focus on these processes within a teaching context. Kansanen, Hansén, Sjöberg, and Kroksmark (2011) claim that is more important to distinguish between a general Didaktik (Allgemeine Didaktik) and a more content-oriented Didaktik (Fachdidaktik). In the context of the thesis, no clear distinction between Didaktik—as the study of teaching and teaching processes—and Pädagogik—as the study of becoming human among humans—is being made. This has to do with the study’s purpose of understanding the practice of teaching as a practice of attention formation. As a practice of attention formation, teaching summons and brings about different possibilities for the self-

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11 Künzli (1998) sees the gradual separation between Allgemeine Didaktik and Fachdidaktik as a sign of a decreasing influence of humanistic pedagogy on teacher education.
activities of the attentive subject. In that respect, the study is situated within the context of Allgemeine Didaktik.

**Didaktik in the Swedish Context**

In the Swedish context, the psychological focus on teaching, dominant ever since education (pedagogik in Swedish) was established as an academic discipline, began to be questioned in the 1960s. This questioning resulted in four major fields of educational research (Sundgren, 2012; Carlgren, 2012). The common denominator for the fields was the way they critically studied the relation between students, teachers, and subject matter, both in terms of problematizing cause-and-effect approaches in relations between policy, curricula, and practice, and in terms of breaking away from “conceptions derived from mainstream cognitive psychology in describing learning processes in the classroom” (Entwistle & Popkewitz, 1997, pp. 177–178). The approaches took different forms. There were Dahlöf and Lundgren’s critical curriculum theory (i.e. ramfaktorteorin; Broady, 1999) and socio-political perspectives (Säfström, 1994, 1999; Englund, 2008) that focused on the political and ethical aspects of policy and curricula and their consequences for teaching practice. There were also socio-cultural perspectives (see, e.g., Säljö, 2003) that focused on the cultural and social aspects of knowledge and learning processes as well as phenomenographic perspectives that focused on students’ own conceptions of a specific content of teaching (Marton, 1997). These approaches have been complemented by pragmatic or neo-pragmatic approaches to education (Biesta & Burbules, 2003; Cherryholmes, 1988) that resonate with the Didaktik approach, as they focus on normativity, justice, and meaning making in relation to a notion of teaching as a kind of democratic conversation about the world between teachers and students. Specific to these neo-pragmatic approaches are their notions of plurality and contingency, which draw the focus toward the unique and particular character of educational practices. In Sweden, these neo-pragmatic approaches to the field of Didaktik have resulted in critical studies of teaching in general (see, e.g., Säfström, 2000, 2007; Englund, 2000, von Wright, 2007, Östman, 2007, Tornberg, 2007) and
of teaching in relation to specific subject matters (see, e.g., Östman, 2000; Tornberg, 2000).

**Teaching from and through Difference**

When questions about democracy, justice, and meaning are brought into the picture, it is not possible to narrow the practice of teaching down to the promotion of learning (qualification) or the passing on of societal norms (socialization). Teaching as an interpersonal practice can in itself enact democracy, justice, and meaning and must therefore also address the possibilities for subjectification (Biesta, 2009) or, as Saeverot (2011) argues, the possibilities for students to either reject or choose to change their paths in life. To Biesta (2014), the event of teaching has to do with an encounter with otherness and difference. Through a discussion of Todd’s notion of *learning from* (Todd, 2003), Biesta (2014) elaborates on and develops a notion of *being taught by*, which means something completely different from both *learning* and *learning from*. Teaching, says Biesta, can be understood as a weak power, a power that teachers have little control over, since it is up to the students to accept (or reject) the content of teaching (see also Saeverot, 2011). The content of teaching, in Biesta’s (2014) discussions, is the element of otherness and difference that teachers bring to the table (and not the specific content of a subject matter). Therefore, teaching needs teachers, but they are not the only factor needed for teaching to occur. Biesta’s philosophical triangulation of teaching involves someone who teaches, someone who accepts being taught, and something that comes from the outside and brings something radically new. When Biesta speaks in terms of receiving the gift of teaching, he leans towards the student figure in the triadic relation. However, it is not necessarily the teacher that brings about this gift. As the teaching depends on all three elements that make up the triad, both the giving and the receiving are interconnected. Whether teaching will be given or not or received or not remain open questions.

What Biesta does put his finger on is how the practice of teaching must find ways to cope with incompleteness. This, I believe, has to do with the fact that the care of the teacher (c.f. Noddings 1984; Stiegler,
Teaching and Attention as Questions for Didaktik

(2010) is never only a care for the student but also a care for the subject matter, the thing in common, to which both the student and the teacher have different relations (see, e.g., Masschelein & Simons, 2013). This relational approach to teaching contributes to and develops Mollenhauer’s (2014) idea of teachers/parents being responsible for the continuation of a life worth living. Based on Biesta’s (2014) discussions, teaching must be aimed not only toward the student as a concrete other but also toward the student as a future other and toward the future society in which the student will live. (For a thorough educational discussion on the relation between the individual’s future and the society’s future, see, e.g., Nordmark, 2015.)

Teaching at the Intersection of Didaktik and Pädagogik

Teaching can be said to emerge in and be enacted through the triadic relation of a “self,” an “other,” and a “world.” The quotation marks are used to stress that none of these components can be completely accounted for without the others. For example, Biesta (2014) interprets the identity of the teacher as a sporadic identity, since the events of teaching are quite rare in the everyday practice of teaching and learning. In the same way, one could also say that the identity of the student is a sporadic identity and that the content the teacher brings into teaching is sporadic in terms of being something new and radically different. In other words, they form a whole that can be explained neither as a sum of its parts nor by any other function where these parts function as variables. Rather, it is the triadic relation as a whole that emerges as an event in time and space. This relational approach also makes it possible to think of the teacher as either the “other” or the “self” in relation to the student, who can be thought of in the same way. Every participant in the teaching event thus has the possibility of being taught by acknowledging and responding to the new that is brought into the event. In the same way, every participant in the teaching event has the possibility of bringing something new in relation to which the other participants can respond.

The basic point of the above discussion is that the term “teaching” signifies an activity that involves a relation between teachers, students,
and something else, of which none can exist without the others. Framing teaching in this manner means that a student is only a student if he or she stands in a relation to a teacher and some subject matter. The same goes for the other two constituents of the activity. This means that teaching (and not students, teachers, or curricula) is seen as the smallest meaning-carrying unit of education, in the same way that the word (and not the letters) is the smallest meaning-carrying unit of a language.

There are more things to say about the practice of teaching, especially when it comes to its relational characteristics. With Klafki’s critical constructive approach, Didaktik can be said to take a central position within Pädagogik, as Didaktik concerns the whole human being as she is addressed within the context of teaching, not just methods for transferring objective knowledge between teachers and students (Blankertz, 1980/1987). With the notion of teaching as a sporadic event, Biesta (2014) aims at specifying its possibilities for bringing about and acknowledging uniqueness and emancipation. In the Pädagogik tradition there are in fact two principles that enable the relational traits of education to be understood in a way similar to Biesta’s non-teleological notion of teaching. These principles are the summons to self-activity and Bildsamkeit.

**Teaching as a (Specific) Summons to Self-Activity**

In the context of teaching, attention is connected to the gestures of showing and observing. These gestures can be more or less explicit. With the notion of a meta-pedagogy, Ergas (2015) acknowledges the built-in call for attention that is latent in both the actions and the sayings of teachers. Through this combination of a discursive and an embodied call for attention, it can be said that the teacher initiates a forming of a whole complex of relations that emerges through the intentionality of the one who is showing and the intentionality of the one who observes (see, e.g., Uljens, 1997, p. 174). This (co-)intentionality is also split up between an interpersonal and an observational level in that someone wants someone else to engage in self-activity that should be directed toward a specific object, concept, or gesture. But how does one promote
self-activity and self-formation without constraining the freedom and integrity of the ones being taught?

Uljens (1998), drawing on Benner (2015), has argued that what makes education a foundational and relational category of human life is the intergenerational tension between the postulated freedom of the subject and the societal presupposition of the necessity of specific forms of desirable conduct. Education as a phenomenon can therefore be said to emerge from a double tension: one emerging from the generational split between the (potential) future and (actual) history of social reconstruction and/or development and the other emerging from the interpersonal split between the autonomy of the subject and the forms made available for the subject to exist and transform. This double tension is inherent in the educational principles Bildsamkeit and Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit (Uljens, 2001).

Bildsamkeit and Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit are used by Benner (2015) to outline a non-affirmative theory of education. Benner starts from a notion of education as a domain of coexistence that is based on four principles, two constitutive and two regulative (Uljens, 1998). The two constitutive principles are those mentioned above, the principle of Bildsamkeit (educability) and the principle of Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit (summons to self-activity). The former principle, derived from Herbart’s notion of education, can be said to concern the possibilities and limits of educational aims and purposes, whereas the latter, derived from Fichte’s notion of education, concerns the possibility of the very existence of education itself (Uljens, 2001).

Uljens (1998) describes the principle of the summons to self-activity (Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit) as concerning the educator’s demand of the student to engage in free activity—a fostering of the will, so to speak. Uljens (2001) means that this fostering of the will could lead to an “educational paradox” in that it presupposes the subject’s

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12 The regulative principles are the principle of the transformation of societal into educational determination and the principle of the non-hierarchical relationship between the other domains of coexistence, which in Benner’s theory are work, ethics, politics, art, and religion (Uljens, 1998).

13 This term comes from Fichte, who defined Erziehung as “Die Aufforderung zur freien Selbsttätigkeit” (Fichte, 1795–6/2000, p. 32). Chapter six will deal with Fichte’s own notion of Aufforderung.
Teaching and Attention as Questions for Didaktik

autonomy while ignoring the subject’s knowledge of that autonomy (see also Uljens, 2004; Løvlie, 2007b). However, the principle of the summons to self-activity (Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit) can be interpreted from a more relational perspective if one regards the fact that, from an educational standpoint, it is the newcomers, born into the world, who summon those who are to take responsibility and to care for them (Uljens, 2001; see also Arendt, 1961/2003).

It will be shown in Part II that Fichte’s own discussions on Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit can be seen as an attempt to construe a notion of subjectivity that is based on neither intersubjectivity nor pure solipsism (see also Kivelä, 2012, p. 83). Uljens (2001) does show that the notion of the summons to self-activity (Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit) does not stand in the way for a relational understanding of educational activities. However, rather than discussing the overlapping of the existential and cultural dimensions of educational relations, he focuses on one dimension at a time. The existential dimension is explained by the empirical fact of the birth of the child, who provokes the parents to take care of him or her. The cultural dimension is explained by the cultural patterns that the child takes over from the parents (Uljens, 2001). Furthermore, since the educational relations operate in at least three domains, which can only be separated analytically and not practically (Biesta, 2009), it is in the lived experience of these tensions that the ethical dimensions of educational relations come to the fore.

In this relational approach, there is an inherent interest in leaving open what lies behind any presumed or predetermined social categories and/or ways of living (Säfström, 2005; Biesta, 2006). At stake in Säfström’s (2005) and Biesta’s (2006) discussions are the ethical challenges that emerge from the tension between education as a summons to self-activity (Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit) and education as a process leading to a socially construed and sanctioned Bildung, which always carries a potentially destructive or excluding element (Säfström & Månsson, 2004).

Instead of focusing on Bildung as a principal aim for educational processes and activities, one could focus on the principle of Bildsamkeit because Bildsamkeit concerns the possible paths and forms of teaching
Teaching and Attention as Questions for Didaktik

and the self-activity that teaching promotes in terms of potentiality and uniqueness rather than in terms of learning goals and predetermined social categories.

Teaching and the Notion of Bildsamkeit

Benner (2015) states that any theory of education is incomplete if it does not take into consideration both the principle of the summons to self-activity (Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit) and the principle of Bildsamkeit. Benner derives his proposition from Fichte’s notion of Aufforderung, a summoning that one intelligent human being directs toward another intelligent human being. In his reading of Fichte, Benner interprets this intelligence (Intelligenz) as Bildsamkeit. While the summons to self-activity (Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit) is, as shown in the previous paragraph, an educational impetus directed toward a subject to self-actively engage in something, Bildsamkeit is connected to the possible forms of such self-active engagement.

Uljens (2001), following Benner, says that the two principles can be regarded as two aspects of the same whole and that the one cannot be thought without the other. In Herbart’s lectures on education, the student’s Bildsamkeit is presented as that which makes education possible (Herbart, 1835/1917/1993). However, Herbart states that Bildsamkeit cannot be seen as infinitely potential or limitless but must be considered in relation to the uniqueness of the individual child, the child’s surroundings, and the educator’s own abilities (Herbart, 1835/1917/1993).

Mollenhauer (2014) states that a child’s Bildsamkeit is manufactured, since it can be seen as a response to culture, that is, as existing in relation to the order of things in which the child grows up. To Mollenhauer, the child’s Bildsamkeit is intersubjective because of language’s pivotal role in the child’s growing participation in society (2014, p. 60).

Uljens (1998) also comments on the intersubjective possibilities of the concept by describing it, with reference to Benner, as a relational category rather than an educational activity or a characteristic of a person. Løvlie (2007a, p. 94) goes further and describes Bildsamkeit as
a concept that points toward the total field in which a student participates and acts. According to Siljander (2012), Herbart’s own discussions on *Bildsamkeit* indicate that it is constantly shaped and reshaped in the relation between the teacher and the student. Therefore, it is neither completely fixed nor completely open.

**Attention as a Question for Didaktik**

If it is the subject matter itself that should evoke and engage the students, the very phrase *Pay attention!* seems somewhat redundant. On one hand, it is clearly used by teachers to calm students down or wake them up from actual or presumed disinterest. On the other hand, the “paying attention” is in itself educationally significant, in line with earlier discussions about Herbart’s (1908) and Montessori’s (Sobe, 2004) respective thoughts on the purpose of education or the already-mentioned discussions from educational philosophy (especially Lewin, 2014; Ingold, 2001; Masschelein & Simons, 2013; Cornelissen, 2010). The phrase by itself will not make someone attend to a specific activity or to a specific subject matter, but it can nevertheless function as a potential wake-up call. It can either work as an intervention through which the teacher asserts him- or herself as a speaker in front of the students or it can work as an invitation by encouraging the students to take part in coming or ongoing educational activities. In the latter case, the phrase gains a twofold meaning: On the one hand it points toward something—an object, an idea, or an event; and on the other hand it is directed toward the ones who should attend, and it can be seen as an invitation to become an attentive subject. A call for attention could therefore be seen as a certain form of summons to self-activity (*Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit*) in the sense that it invites a person to engage in a relation. Paying attention, on the other hand, means pursuing that relation and thus exploring one’s *Bildsamkeit*. Sobe (2004) puts it as follows:

> Attention works to create a subject—not a subject that is present and fully revealed through its own transparency, but a subject that is internally present to itself through the mastery and organization of its own obscured and enchanted attractions. (Sobe, 2004, p. 297)
In a Didaktik approach to teaching as a practice of attention formation, the relation between the summoning of an attentive subject and the potential trajectories of transformation (i.e., forms of Bildsamkeit) that are constituted through that summoning comes to the fore. Both of the principles can be approached non-affirmatively, which means that they do not bear with them particular notions of the self or particular educational ends for their activities. In sketching his non-affirmative notion of education, Benner (2005, p. 43) draws on Herbart’s distinction between Erziehender Unterricht, a theoretical conception of the formative aspects of the teaching practice, and Zucht as the actual formation that takes place in the teaching practice. According to Benner, the notion of Zucht dissolves the distinction between the teacher and the student, since it lies closer to what happens in the lived practice of teaching, which is based on relations rather than functions. The main objects of interest in relation to the purpose of exploring teaching as attention formation is the relation between the Aufforderung (the summons) and the Selbsttätigkeit (self-assertion/self-activity) and the relation between the subject’s process of transformation (Bildsamkeit) and this self-assertion/self-activity. These relations can be seen as relations of attention, where the former is connected to a subject’s attention to the other (who expresses the summons) and to itself (becoming a subject in responding to the summons) and the latter is connected to the subject’s attention to the world and to its (the subject’s) future self. The phrase Pay attention!—or any other gesture calling for attention—could be seen as a certain form of Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit in the sense that it invites or summons a person to engage in a transformative relation. The actual “paying attention” would then be to pursue this relation in order to activate and explore the Bildsamkeit brought about through pedagogical action.

Concluding Discussion

In this chapter I have put forth the practice of teaching as a triadic configuration of teachers, students, and subject matter. This configuration gets its characteristics from the relational principles of summons to self-activity and Bildsamkeit. As such, teaching as a
practice must be understood from, not one, but from all of the conceptual paradigms of educational theory, Bildung, upbringing, and teaching. By stressing a relational interpretation of the summons to self-activity and Bildsamkeit and the teaching event as a sporadic event where something new is both brought into the picture and acknowledged as a means to change or transform, this event has been described as an event of attention formation. Based on a triadic notion of teaching, it is evident that very different types of attention can be at work in the teaching event. From an atomistic perspective of the teaching triad, one could understand attention formation as the relations that develop between the three members of the triad: the relation between student and subject matter, the relation between teacher and subject matter, and the relation between teacher and student. From a relational perspective it becomes important to understand how these relations (and also the relations between these relations) form and change in and through the practice of teaching.

Part III consists of a Rancièreian exploration of the notion of teaching as attention formation by considering the tension between teaching as a summons to self-activity and teaching as a summons to self-transformation. In brief, in Part III, I will explore attention as a medium between interpersonal intentionality (education as a summons to self-activity) and the potential fields of experience/subjectivity (Bildsamkeit) that this co-intentionality brings about. The guiding structure for thinking and writing about this medium is the triadic relation between student, teacher, and subject matter as it is formed through the lived praxis of teaching. More specifically, I will explore how Rancière’s notion of intellectual emancipation and his notion of aesthetics resonate with and add to this structure and to a radical relational understanding of attention and teaching.
PART III: Teaching and Attention with Rancière
5. An Aesthetic Approach to Teaching

The purpose is to explore the notion of teaching as attention formation. From the discussions in the previous chapters, this purpose can now be further sharpened. By approaching teaching as a practice of attention formation, I explore the relation between teaching as a summoning of an attentive subject’s self-activity (eine Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit) and teaching as the bringing about of potential trajectories of transformation (i.e., forms of Bildsamkeit). In doing this, attention is framed as a quality emerging out of an educational relation or situation, rather than as an individual characteristic or ability that is necessary for the performance of schoolwork. Furthermore, by going beyond the dichotomy paying/getting attention, the question of attention can regain its significance in educational thinking and practice, especially from a radical relational perspective. The guiding question in this exploration is, as stated earlier, in what way(s) can teaching be seen as an activity of attention formation?

In Part I and II the separation between attention and teaching was problematized through stressing the educational significance of approaching attention as something integral to the practice of teaching. Drawing on Rancière’s discussions of education aesthetics and politics,
it will be shown in this part that education is always at risk of ignoring possible relations of attentive (i.e., reasonable) willing in favor of distracted (i.e., perverted and rhetorical) willing that reproduces hierarchical structures of intelligence (Rancière, 1991, 2010, 2011). By elaborating on Rancière’s notion of aesthetics and politics (Rancière, 1999, 2006, 2007, 2011/2013), an aesthetic interpretation of the notion of teaching as attention formation will be derived.

In this chapter, I present some key features of Rancière that have special relevance within the context of the thesis.

The Political Side of Education

Rancière (1991) approaches education in a way that does not fit with any of the usual liberal, conservative, or progressive discourses that are often used to frame ideas concerning educational purposes and goals (Ross, 1991; see also Jeynes, 2007, for a more thorough discussion on different competing educational discourses). By entering into—by reading, commenting on, and continuing—the educational adventures of Joseph Jacotot, the hero of The Ignorant Schoolmaster, Rancière not only illustrates the impossibilities of institutionalized education but he also takes the first steps toward his own version of a mature political theory (Davis, 2010). The conclusion from the book is that, as education and society as a whole are based on an explanatory fiction, they can never become equal or arrange themselves toward an increasing equality:

> Whoever has consented to the fiction of the inequality of intelligence, whoever has refused the unique equality that the social order can allow, can do nothing but run from fiction to fiction, and from ontology to corporation, to reconcile the sovereign people with the retarded people, the inequality of intelligence with the reciprocity of rights and duties. Public Instruction, the instituted social fiction of inequality as lateness, is the magician that will reconcile all these reasonable beings. It will do it by infinitely extending the field of its explications and the examinations that control them. (Rancière, 1991, p. 132)

To escape the explanatory set-up of (institutionalized) education, Rancière introduces an axiom of equality, which states that equality already exists, not between citizens but between men [sic!]. Educational
practices that place emancipation in the center should therefore not try to create equality because this would only establish or reinstate a hierarchical order of intelligences. These practices should instead let educational interventions take as their starting point the assumption of equality of intelligence and then verify this equality in practice. The key figure in this event of intellectual emancipation is a so-called ignorant schoolmaster, who, through the assumption of equality of intelligences, establishes a relation of wills rather than, as in traditional education, a relation of intelligences.

Rancière claims, in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, that a relation of intelligences always comes as a result of teaching practices that are based only on explanations. In these practices someone who knows more explains something to someone who knows less and thus establishes or reinstates a hierarchy of intelligences. To Rancière, the characteristic of this hierarchy is that students are not only explained to in terms of a specific content, they are also explained to in terms of not knowing what they do not know. School, in this sense, is built on a logic that has to continuously reinstate itself through the act of explaining its necessity to those who do not yet understand its necessity. A teacher who renounces this logic would also renounce intelligence as a particular *educational* interest, at least in terms of intelligence being established as an aim or result for the individual student. The educational, that is, emancipatory, interest is instead directed toward the students’ work, attention, and discipline. The work is affirmed when the students recapitulate what they have done and what they are doing. The task for an ignorant schoolmaster is therefore not to explain but to demand that the students work, pay attention to their work, and speak of their work. The work is verified in speech, because everyone has the capacity to speak, according to Rancière:

> What was important—the manifestation of liberty—lay elsewhere: in the equal *art* that, in order to support these antagonistic positions, the one translated from the other; in the *esteem* for that power of the intelligence that doesn’t cease being exercised at the very heart of rhetorical irrationality; in the *recognition* of what speaking can mean for whoever renounces the pretension of being right and saying the truth at the price of the other’s death. (Rancière, 1991, p. 137)
This ability to speak is also what makes the pedagogy of emancipation into a political theory, of which the book *Disagreement* (Rancière, 1999) is an important contribution. If anyone can speak, even those who do not count can speak. This is what Rancière (1999) refers to as the political event of subjectification. This event of politics occurs when the part of no part speaks, and it is an event that is always local and occasional. Therefore, Rancière has to make a distinction between the *police* as the existing order of things (e.g., the administrative and upholding side of modern politics, but it can also be the order established in a classroom) and *politics* as a temporary rupture in the police: “Politics exists wherever the count of parts and parties of society is disturbed by the inscription of a part of those who have no part” (Rancière, 1999, p. 123). To Rancière, politics is not a harmonious community of interests, since the *inter* of a political *interesse* creates a rupture rather than a relation. Politics is therefore an event that sometimes occurs, often unpredicted regarding both its form and origins:

The Political community is a community of interruptions, fractures, irregular and local, through which egalitarian logic comes and divides the police community from itself….Political being-together is a being-between: between identities, between worlds. (Rancière, 1999, p. 137)

Highlighting these political dimensions and their radical possibilities in educational contexts leads not only to a way of addressing the complexities and challenges of educational praxis; it also allows for the possibility of approaching the interdependent relation between teaching and attention.

**Teaching: Sharpening the Definition with Rancière**

The specific area of education that I explore is the practice of teaching, with a special focus on its interpersonal and situation-specific characters and their relation to the notion of attention formation. This

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14 This term is not to be confused with Foucault’s governmental subjectivation, which is a term that describes a subject’s place within an existing discursive order, rather than the subject’s possibility of breaking with this order, which is more what Rancière is aiming at (see Simons & Masschelein, 2010b).
area, I claim, lays close to Säfström’s description of teaching and learning, where teaching is “a particular way of speaking, a confirmation of a certain equality through which noise is turned into discourse by connecting different worlds” (Säfström, 2011b, p. 487), and where learning is “fundamentally about living a life in the presence of others in the present” (Säfström, 2011b, p. 488). None of these notions reduces teaching to the transmission and acquisition of ready-made knowledge. Rather, they point to teaching as a lived event, where the disposition of the subjects’ relation to the world (potentially) becomes altered in a way that radically changes them; that is, the subjects become aware of themselves as attending beings. Rancière writes:

Equality is fundamental and absent, timely and untimely, always up to the initiative of individuals and groups who, set against the ordinary course of events, take the risk of verifying their equality, of inventing individual and collective forms for its verification. Affirmation of these principles in fact constitutes an unprecedented dissonance, a dissonance one must, in a way, forget in order to continue improving schools, programs and pedagogies, but that one must also, from time to time, listen to again so that the act of teaching does not lose sight of the paradoxes that give it meaning. (Rancière, 2010, pp. 15–16)

Säfström, in line with the political and educational insights of Rancière, continues:

Teaching and learning are not commonsensical. If so, it would only be repeating the same endlessly. Teaching and learning are not about making more sense, but about changing the sense. And when it occasionally does so, one is present for another at exactly this moment in this particular world. (Säfström, 2011b, p. 489)

Exploring the non-commonsensical dimensions of teaching brings to the fore the consequences of allowing teaching to change senses, to cut through and to reconstitute the sensible realm in ways that let the students come forth as self-active subjects in a world of difference, and this because these non-commonsensical dimensions enable a notion of attention that is brought about from the inherent contingency of the interpersonal, transgenerational, and lived practice of teaching. The next paragraph will delve into Rancière’s notion of this political
becoming—which he calls subjectification—and its relation to attention.

**Subjectification and the Aesthetic Side of Education**

Subjectification, for Rancière, has to do with the possibilities of claiming a space within a specific discursive configuration, something that could reconfigure the discourse itself and enable (political) action therein. Whereas education (whether conservative or progressive) as a means of creating an equal society is doomed to fail, school can nevertheless be a place for actualization of democratic experiences. In *On the Shores of Politics*, Rancière (2007, p. 55) writes of school as a “site of a permanent negotiation of equality between the democratic state and the democratic individual.” This political dimension of education is not to be found in the outer forms of school as an institution but within the interpersonal relations that are established in the everydayness of educational praxis and in the ruptures that cut through this everydayness. Ryther (2014, p. 83) takes the term *raving reasonably* from *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* and interprets it as a form of micro-politics for everyone to execute in their own processes of personal renewal, which can all contribute to changes in the social fabric.

With its constant negotiation of equality, the political dimension of school also has an aesthetic side. Politics and aesthetics have a strong kinship in Rancière’s writings. He describes them both as configurations of a distinctive sphere of experience. This sphere consists of, on the one hand, objects that are defined as being common and being ruled by the same decisions and, on the other hand, subjects that are recognized as having the means to articulate and to discuss those objects (Rancière, 2006, p. 96). The possibility of education to reconfigure, or redistribute, ways of seeing, thinking, and doing makes it both a political and an aesthetic activity. If education is seen as an arena of common objects of interest, it can be understood as an arena of shared attention. In this arena there could be time and place to discuss the common world as well as to make a world in common by “putting things on the table” (see Masschelein & Simons, 2013). As such, it
becomes an arena where one could speak of an aesthetics of teaching. This way of approaching education and educational relations means moving from the study of processes of representation and transmission to the study of the praxis of presentation and translation (Rancière, 2011). This move brings attention to the fore as a central element in educational relations. With Rancière, attention is also closely connected to the will, which will be shown in the following paragraph.

**Rancière’s Pedagogical Paradox: Attention and Will**

To Rancière (1991), education, in its institutional form, becomes problematic because it must define and control its object(s) of attention. He stresses the importance of the teacher not directing attention but instead being attentive to the attention of the students. To him, it is therefore impossible to discuss attention without mentioning its presumed opposite, distraction. Distraction is not the inability to pay attention but rather the refusal to acknowledge the fundamental inequality that, to Rancière, so often characterizes educational relations. Distraction is not the characteristic trait of the uninterested student but something enacted by the explicator. A distracted explicator is one who does not show any particular interest in the other’s attention (and will) and, in the act of explaining, constructs the object of attention, that is, the object to be learned. The act of explaining as a way of both deciding and defining the object of attention is a way of ignoring the other’s abilities and simultaneously constructing his inabilities (i.e., his distraction). According to Bingham and Biesta (2010, p. 114), even progressive strands of education, such as the experiential method of Dewey or the emancipatory education of Freire, cannot fully escape this logic of explanation. Through the explanatory act, a hierarchical order of intelligences becomes rhetorically reinstated, while the object of (the explicator’s) interest gets separated from the student. For Rancière, education as an institution is the perfect symbol for this kind of distraction. This way of looking at education becomes possible if one regards the distinction between attention and distraction as one of politics rather than logic. The difference plays out as a certain partitioning of the sensible that enables some activities (e.g., the teacher
talking to the students, the students listening to the teacher) to be considered attentive and others to be considered distractive (e.g., teachers listening to colleagues instead of students, students talking to friends instead of teachers). In a hierarchical order of intelligences, the object of attention is pointed out by someone who has the power in the educational relation (the teacher) or someone who stands outside of it (curricula, dominating discourses, policymakers).

In chapter three it was shown that Stiegler (2010) promoted education as an important institution that, if based on care and waiting, could form a public attention with the general purpose of constructing a collective we. While Stiegler focuses on the problems arising from the failure of educational practices and institutions to take responsibility for this formation of attention, Rancière (1991) focuses on the dangers of those educational practices that (voluntarily or involuntarily) confuse distraction with attention. For Rancière (1991), school as an institution is and always has been problematic, not only because of its way of constructing the object(s) of attention but also because of its way of explicating it and directing focus toward it.

Intellectual emancipation is the result of a relation that is first and foremost volitional. By assuming equality of intelligence, the ignorant schoolmaster can do nothing more than demand that the students work hard, pay attention, and speak of their work (Rancière, 1991, p. 31). Attention thus lies at the core of intellectual emancipation, not as an instrument to receive transmitted knowledge from the teacher but as a power for the students to use when they seek out their own paths. To Rancière, the notion of attention and the notion of will are closely connected, and the connection can be found in his distinction between a reasonable/attentive will and a perverted/distracted will:

One need only play the radical exteriority of the linguistic order against the exteriority of reason. The reasonable will, guided by its distant link with the truth and by its desire to speak with those like it, controls that exteriority, regains it through the force of attention. The distracted will, detoured from the road of equality, uses it in the opposite way, in the rhetorical mode, to hasten the aggregation of minds, their plummet into the universe of material attraction. (Rancière, 1991, p. 82)

To Rancière, the virtue of ignorance plays out as a communicative relation of one will paying attention to another will. The assumed
equality is an equality of difference, and it is the difference (between subjects) that makes the relation necessary. This means that the relation in itself does not have to be explained in order to be established. The perverted will, which lies behind the stultifying relation, is based on a rhetoric that ignores the will of the other. This rhetoric looks for (and believes in) truth in language and therefore does not need the other, except for establishing a hierarchical master/disciple relation in the act of explanation. If no attention is paid to the will of the other, the other becomes an object (of stultification) and not a subject (of emancipation). The educational relation becomes, in line with Rancière’s discussions, connected to (the shortcomings of) language, attention, and speech.

By following the logic of Rancière, one finds a significant difference between the demand for attention and the demand for attention to a specific object of interest. The reasonable, or attentive, will is relational by definition (communicative/translational/open): it pays attention to and controls what Rancière refers to as the exteriority of the linguistic order. This can be interpreted as follows: A reasonable will embraces truth and reason not in relation to some linguistic sign but in relation to the experience of a language that is able to encompass neither its own meaning nor an essence of truth and reason. To Rancière, truth lingers beyond language and is felt in a translational reciprocity of attentive communication. Since the reasonable will is a will that strives for the understanding of another will, this will cannot exist outside of an interpersonal relation but only in a realm of shared attention.

Cornelissen (2010) concludes that the attention put forth by Rancière is a particular use of intelligence: “It is the result of rigorous effort to look carefully, to be in the presence of facts, and to answer a triple question: What do I see? What do I think? What do I say?” (Cornelissen, 2010, p. 532). It is this effort that is the central aim for an ignorant schoolmaster, who must constantly give room for and encourage the students to speak of their work in relation to this self-reflective question.
A Rancièrian Perspective on Teaching and Attention

From the perspective of the teacher, it is easy to make getting and directing attention into the only thing that counts in the educational moment. Teaching can also be said to form attention, according to Stiegler (2010), and since education, to him, should be the basis of a public attention formation, teachers have a responsibility for both the subject matter and the ways through which the students engage with (i.e., attend to) the subject matter. The subject matter is therefore not only an object of study but also an object through the engagement of which students pursue their own processes of maturation (Stiegler, 2010).

From a relational perspective, students are defined through the relation between them and the teacher and the relation between them and the subject matter. Teachers are defined in the same manner: through their relation to the subject matter and their relation to the student. This triadic relationship is known as the Didaktik triangle (Hopmann, 1997). There is also a reciprocal dimension to this relatiornality which produces a certain relation between the student and the subject matter that calls for the teacher’s attention. Teaching thus becomes an activity of reciprocal attention formation, where every activity has the potential to set up the Didaktik triangle as a unique configuration of attention formation.

The Didaktik triangle illustrates in a straightforward way the complexity of relations that are all at work in the activity of teaching. Furthermore, if the model is interpreted from a relational perspective, it also reflects the dynamics of teaching in a way that allows for discussions concerning becoming, subjectivity, and transformation in relation to both the form and content of educative events.\(^{15}\)

Following the Rancièrian train of thought, attention can be said to operate on (at least) two levels. First, it operates as a means to enable an awareness of the aesthetics of teaching, that is, teaching as a certain partitioning of the sensible and education as an institution that constitutes a realm of possible ways of doing, saying, and thinking.

\(^{15}\) In Part III, I will return to the Didaktik triangle, using it as a means to illustrate some of my theoretical contributions.
Second, it operates as an *activité propre*, in that it also enables the partitioning of the sensible by being an activity that cuts through the police order of education, making it a realm of unpredictability and potential emancipation. To Rancière, education can never escape the limits of institutionalization, and it will therefore always take the outer form of a schooling institution. However, with Rancière, there will always be a possibility of subjectification, no matter what the context is. When Rancière speaks of subjectification, it is not necessarily in connection to education. Subjectification is the event when someone who is not visible or hearable in the police order claims a space under the assumption of equality. While *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* brings forth an educational argument in order to criticize societal inequalities in general, it does not explicitly describe intellectual emancipation in terms of subjectification (a term that Rancière starts using in later writings, *Dissensus* being the first). However, by assuming equality of intelligence in the summoning of an attentive subject, establishing a will-to-will relation, there is a possibility to see an ignorant schoolmaster as someone who paves the way for subjectification.

Davis (2010) points out that neither *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* nor *Dissensus* deal with what comes after the event of subjectification. This is where the aesthetic writings of Rancière come into the picture and function as a complement to the notion of intellectual emancipation and the notion of subjectification. In addressing the similarities between politics and aesthetics as activities that can produce a partitioning of the sensible, Rancière allows a reading of the teaching practice as a political/aesthetic endeavor where subjectification is both possible and expected (see Lewis, 2012). By folding Rancière’s aesthetic discussions back onto his educational discussions, it becomes possible to do a Rancièrian reading of Rancière. These discussions give some hints as to how one could deal with, if not the aftermath of subjectification, at least the different ways of establishing relations with the surrounding world and of exercising attention. Subjectification can thus be described as the educational event when someone, as a unique other, is being called into presence and given room to claim and speak for their interest. Subjectification therefore concerns not only the becoming of an attentive subject but also the relation between the attentive subject
and the world, the quality of specific forms of attending, and, finally, the formation of attention itself.

If notions of uniqueness and emancipation are to be kept within a theory of education, this theory must consider the uniqueness of these subject/object relations at the same time that it speaks of the formation of subjectivity in more general terms. A theory of education must therefore have a conception of attention in which attention is seen as one or several specific qualities emerging from educational activities and situations. An educational theory can only be “half ready,” since it cannot be explicit about what will happen in an educational encounter, which will always be open and unpredictable to some extent (Herbart, 1908; van Manen, 1990; Säfström, 2005). What can be more thoroughly explored, though, is the way in which these subject/object relations form or are formed. This way of approaching education makes it possible to move from a conception of education as a teleological praxis of willed becoming (where the will in question is a contested and negotiated field between two or more subjects) toward a praxis of political attention formation (i.e. subjectification).

From a critical relational perspective on education, teaching is a relational practice of showing and observing, but it is also about taking responsibility for what is shown, how it is shown, and what the consequences are for this. With Säfström’s (2005) reading of Levinas, the central question is “With what right do I teach?”, a question that opens up for an attending to the educational relation that is not based on the transference of ready-made representations of the world or fixed categories of being-in-the-world. Säfström’s (2005) reading also allows for a notion of teaching as a practice of creating a common world—a common world based on difference rather than sameness. Teaching brings about both possibilities and limits for subjectification. Attention, seen as an adverbial and situation-specific phenomenon, is awakened and/or formed in the educational situation constituted by the event of teaching. An educational situation has an aesthetic quality because it constitutes a sensible realm of possible ways of doing, thinking, and saying. It has a political (in a Ranciérian sense) quality if it is open for ruptures in that realm. It also has an ethical quality if someone takes responsibility for those ruptures. The teacher can be seen as a guardian
of this sensible realm in that the teacher sets up the reasonable limits to the students’ activities. Mead once spoke about education as making meaning and promoting a consciousness of meaning-making through the acquisition of a semiotic symbolic system (Biesta, 2005). Rancière’s notion of education pushes the borders of the semiotic realm through which meaning can be made in the pointing toward and paying attention to a radical exteriority of the linguistic order.

**Concluding Discussion**

In this chapter, by drawing on Rancière, I wanted to address some aesthetic/political notions of teaching and attention, where teaching could be said to redistribute the sensible realm, to assert both the becoming of attentive subjects and the becoming of a (common) world. This turn or return to the relation between attention and education resonates with those educational philosophers who maintain and stress the importance and the possibility of (keeping the notions of) uniqueness and emancipation in educational thinking and acting (Biesta & Säfström, 2011). With Rancière’s notion of aesthetics it becomes possible to think of teaching, not in terms of relations between closed units such as teachers, students, and subject matter, but rather in terms of a relation of reasonable wills, a relation in which attention is constantly formed and reformed.

In the next two chapters I will look more closely into the educational significance of Rancière’s discussions. This will be done by interpreting the educational principles of *summons to self-activity* and *Bildsamkeit* through Rancière’s discussions on education, teaching, attention, and aesthetics.
6. Summoning the Attentive Subject

In this chapter I discuss and elaborate further on teaching as an activity that promotes and brings about attentive and self-active subjects. It is the first of two philosophical investigations in which the principles of summons to self-activity (\textit{Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit}) and \textit{Bildsamkeit}, drawing mainly on Rancière, will be looked upon from their relation to the notion of teaching as attention formation. I will start by elaborating on the concept of \textit{Aufforderung}, which was developed by Fichte and which describes how the subject, as a rational being, must be summoned by another rational being. Through Fichte’s understanding of education as \textit{eine Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit} (a summons or invitation to engage in self-activity), I investigate how teaching can be seen as a specific form of summons, one that brings about attentive subjects. I will later suggest that, from a Rancièrian perspective, the \textit{Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit} could be thought of as a calling of attention, itself, into presence, without having to provide an ontological ground for subjectivity or otherness (as in Fichte’s case).

The analysis of \textit{Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit} put forth in this chapter will not only provide material for the understanding of teaching as the bringing about of attentive subjects, it will also contribute to
discussions initiated by Biesta (2014), Säfström (2005), and Todd (2003), who all stress the ethical dimensions of educational relations, especially when it comes to the responsibility of the educator to provide a setting were transformative incentives and processes can coexist with the integrity of the other. The focus in this analysis is directed toward the (co-)intentional characteristics of educational relations, especially in those events where the ethicality of the encounter is at stake.

**Fichte, Otherness and the Attentive Subject**

The notion of *Aufforderung* was defined and used by Fichte in his book *The Foundation of Natural Right* (1795–6/2000) in which he set out to solve the problem of self-consciousness and to outline the basic principles of a liberal political order (Neuhouser, 2000). Fichte claimed that it was impossible to be conscious of oneself without acknowledging other selves, since one consciousness alone would only produce a circle *ad infinitum* of states of consciousness, trying to capture a solid state that could be the determining ground for the self. He further claimed that a human being could only become conscious of itself through a summons (*eine Aufforderung*) made by another human being. While Uljens (2001) describes this summons as leading to a delicate problem to be solved educationally (How do you educate a free will without imposing it on the other?), Fichte’s own definition and use of *Aufforderung* was an attempt to set a common starting point for self-consciousness and consciousness of other beings. The summons is therefore to be regarded as an account for intersubjectivity, in the sense that the experience of the Other precedes and constitutes the experience of an I.

With Fichte, the encounter with the other and the response to otherness, acknowledged through the other’s summoning, is first and foremost a self-attentive response. But this self-awareness of the summoned subject is only possible through an awareness of other free beings. On that matter Fichte wrote:
The finite rational being cannot ascribe to itself a free efficacy in the sensible world without also ascribing such efficacy to others, and thus without also presupposing the existence of other finite rational beings outside of itself. (Fichte, 1795–6/2000, p. 29)

The notion of freedom is thus only possible together with an outside world that also set up the limits for that freedom: “The nature of an object is such that, when it is comprehended by a subject, the subject’s free activity is posited as constrained” (Fichte, 1795–6/2000, p. 31).

With the notion of Aufforderung, Fichte wanted to describe the asymmetric traits of every initial step toward intersubjectivity. The practical consequence of Aufforderung would be the notion of the reciprocal activity of Anerkennen (recognition), by which Fichte went on to set up his theory of natural right (Fichte, 1795–6/2000). In his reading of Fichte, Wood (2006) claims that the notion of Aufforderung makes the community not the subject itself the starting point for the free subject, and therefore the community outlines both the possibilities and the constraints of this freedom. For Fichte, the self-efficacy of the subject is only possible through the existence of other subjects by which the subject is summoned into self-awareness. The subject, according to Fichte, can only become self-conscious, that is, aware of itself as a free subject, through a summons from the outside world. The summons works as a wake-up call toward the subject, who in turn finds its place in the world among other fellow beings. Therefore, self-awareness is not the only thing made possible through the summons. From this awareness follows also an awareness of the outer world, an outer world that shows itself in and through the very summons calling upon the subject to act.

Wood (2006) suggests that the word Aufforderung, with its many German connotations (spanning all the way from request to demand), be translated to invitation since the summons leaves the subject free “either to do or not do” (Wood, 2006, p. 20) as it is summoned to do. So the activity of the subject, stated Fichte, cannot be seen as a mere impact of the summons, for the summons is always followed by a self-determining action that can in no way be predicted or produced by the summons. Fichte said that a summons can only take place between two rational beings and that the summoning subject must presuppose an
ability in the summoned subject to comprehend the summons. “The purposiveness of the summons is conditional on the understanding and freedom of the being to whom it is addressed” (Fichte, 1795–6/2000, p. 35). In line with Fichte it follows that if there is one rational being, there must be other rational beings. Individuality is thus strongly connected with the notion of a community.

Summoning an attentive subject, for Fichte, is the act of inviting a person to self-assertion and self-efficacy; that is, it is the necessary act of making possible for this person to consider himself or herself a (free) subject. Since this self-assertion only comes from the acknowledging of another human being, attention to oneself necessarily also becomes attention to the other. The summons is therefore what brings forth a becoming of an attentive subject and its object.

**The Summons and Uniqueness**

It can be argued that Fichte’s notion of *Aufforderung*, though seemingly relational by definition, is just another way to reinstate the I as the foundation of interrelational experiences (Uljens, 2001). In that light, the summoning and the one performing the summoning would just be means to reinstate the subject as the ground for thinking, feeling, and acting. However, by looking closer at those parts where Fichte elaborates on the notion of *Aufforderung*, the self-consciousness sprung from the summoning does not have the characteristics of a Cartesian cogito but rather comes forth as an awareness of awareness, a constitution of subjectivity that comprises a subject, the other, and the relation between (Wood, 2006). The subjectivity of the summoning can therefore be regarded more as a contingent subjectivity than a permanent ground for constructing a self and a world, as in the case of the Cartesian cogito. This contingency becomes more apparent if one adds that the summoning, as earlier stated, does not have to be regarded as a command but can be seen as an invitation to act or as an offering of an event of self-realization in which the self is constituted through a unique self–other relationship (self-awareness) together with a relation to this relation (self-efficacy and self-activity). Uljens (2001) describes pedagogical interventions as something that should both summon and
create a safe room in which to respond to the summons so that the stakes (for the student) are not too high. From that perspective one could say that if the summoning is to be regarded as educational, the teacher, as the one summoning, must take responsibility for that action and must also be open to being summoned.

With the notion of *Aufforderung*, subjectivity is linked to difference and uniqueness, since the subject becomes a (self-conscious, i.e., self-attentive) subject only in response to the other’s otherness that both enables and sets the limits for the freedom of the subject. Following Fichte’s discussions, it is possible to understand self-attentiveness as the result of a summons, where one subject is being addressed by another subject. The question of being addressed has been treated by Biesta (2014), Säfström (2005), and Todd (2003), who all stress the importance of not letting education lose its concern for otherness, difference, and the becoming of unique persons. Loss of such concern would mean that education would lose its transformative potential and (at best) turn into mere schooling (Säfström, 2011b). Furthermore, educational interventions are not merely based on a summons but on a summons to engage in self-activity, what Fichte described as *eine Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit*. As noted in chapter four, Benner (2015) claims that an educational theory based solely on the principle of *Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit* is incomplete because it does not take into account the form or direction of the subject’s actions that are supposed to be a response to the summons. Benner further claims that a complete theory of education must be based on the reciprocal relationship between the two constitutive principles of *Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit* and *Bildsamkeit*, where the latter principle regulates the former in giving a form and direction of the subject’s actions.

Before continuing to discuss *Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit*, there are some things that remain to be dealt with regarding the principle of *Aufforderung*. This principle is connected to ethical questions about otherness and difference and therefore also bears some similarities with the pre-epistemological ethics of Levinas (see, e.g., Lumsden, 2000). To Levinas, ethics was purely phenomenal and did not originate in metaphysical principles or deliberative argumentation but in the face-
to-face encounter with the Other (Levinas, 1985). If one draws the ethical implications of Levinas as far as possible, educational actions that contain transformative intentions are ethically problematic, at least if they are based solely upon an epistemological understanding of the subject and that subject’s possibilities (Säfström, 2005; Todd, 2003). What seems to be at stake is whether change, growth, or transformation can be initiated from outside at all without any form of (metaphysical) violence. Instead of stressing the ethical implications of the summoning as an intervention where the freedom and integrity of the subjects involved are at stake, *Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit* could be interpreted from an aesthetic point of view. This will be done in the following paragraphs by turning to two texts of Jacques Rancière: *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* and *The Emancipated Spectator*. These texts explore educational relations in ways that make it possible to interpret *Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit* as a summoning of attention, an event where the attentive subjects are already acknowledged and do not have to be called into being. With Rancière’s understanding of education there is a possibility to construe an ethical (i.e., existentially open) notion of *Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit*.

**The Double Summoning of an Ignorant Schoolmaster**

The question of the I–Other relationship is more than an existential or ethical question for educational thinking. Emancipation refers to the subject’s way of breaking free from the constraints of the other, but it also refers to the other’s way of letting the subject free. In the practice of teaching, something more than the subject’s road to freedom is of interest (Ryther, 2014): there is also the question of the subject’s engagement with and relation to the subject matter or the surrounding world. With Säfström (2007) and his analysis of teaching as a social praxis that forms a contingent context, emancipation has partly to do with the possibility of breaking free from that very context. This makes the question of emancipation into a Didaktik-related challenge, something that Rancière captures with his notion of intellectual emancipation. To him, a free subject is also a seeing subject, a subject that has the potential to be intellectually emancipated. The process of
intellectual emancipation can be catalyzed by someone who takes an interest in another person’s interest and attention. This someone could be an ignorant schoolmaster who refuses to ask the stultifying question “Do you understand?” in favor of the emancipating question “What do you see?” This question posits the subject not only as a self-aware subject but also as a seeing subject—an attentive subject. Therefore, an understanding of *eine Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit* does not have to be based on epistemological suppositions of subjectivity where notions of difference and otherness have no (or little) place.

If interpersonal relations are to be ethically framed [if ethics is seen as a non-rational and phenomenological revelation of the (face of) the other], they would have to resist any forms of understanding or intentionality and be characterized by an infinite responsibility for the other. From that perspective, motivation for educational actions would be problematic purely on ethical grounds, since educational actions are based on both understanding and intentionality. A way out of this educational deadlock would be to look at Rancière’s notion of intellectual emancipation. As shown in the first chapter of this part, Rancière sees educational interventions as practices of explication that reconstitute a hierarchical order of intelligences. He criticizes not only instrumental or conservative forms of education but also liberal and progressive forms by arguing that the paradigmatic example of Plato’s *Meno* dialogue is not at all an example of good pedagogical practice but is, rather, a perfect example of devious stultification wherein Socrates shows off in relation to both *Meno* and the slave, thus reinstating the necessity of a master/teacher (Rancière, 1991, pp. 29–30). For an educational relation to be emancipatory, it cannot be based on explications or knowledge. Rather—and this is where Rancière adds to a Levinas-based critique of education—the relation is based on will and, as will be shown, attention.

In the following paragraphs I investigate how Rancière’s perspectives on attention, school, and aesthetics can be fruitful in the exploration of possible ways of understanding when and how an ethical, emancipatory, and creative educational relation is established. These three perspectives together address the possibility of approaching an educational relation as an aesthetic event, an event that makes some
things visible, speakable, and hearable and some things invisible, unspeakable, and unhearable. The conclusions point to the aesthetic approach as a way of attending to the educational relation on its own conditions, without those conditions having to be specified (calculated) beforehand (i.e., instrumentalism).

**Intellectual Emancipation and the Relation of Wills**

The logic of emancipation can be explained as follows: Starting from the assumption of equal intelligence, the emancipating schoolmaster should explain nothing to the student. By avoiding explication, one also avoids linking of intelligences and hierarchical ordering of such (Rancière, 1991, p. 13), leaving it to the students to follow their own intelligence. By doing this, the virtue of the schoolmaster becomes a virtue of ignorance (Rancière, 2010). The role of the ignorant schoolmaster is to ensure that the students work, are attentive, and speak of the work that has been done (Rancière, 2010, p. 23). Whereas stultification comes from the relation between (different) intelligences, emancipation comes from the relation between wills (Rancière, 2010, p. 13)—a relation based on the assumption of equal intelligence (Rancière, 2010, p. 5). Instead of striving toward (individual) emancipation as the means to become equal, emancipation is the process of starting from the assumption of equal intelligence and verifying it in lived praxis. Instead of asking how to produce a society of equals, which Rancière (1991) says is impossible, one must ask how to follow the assumption or axiom of equal intelligence. To follow this axiom the master also needs to assume something: that people have a will of their own and that they can use it to their own benefit. In the text *On Ignorant Schoolmasters*, Rancière writes:

> The axiom of inequality is an axiom that underwrites inequalities operating on a societal scale. It is not the teacher’s knowledge that can suspend the operation of this machine, but the teacher’s will. (Rancière, 2010, p. 6)

Will, for Rancière, has to do with both an openness to the other and a willful rationality following this openness: “The will is the power to be moved, to act by its own movement, before being an instance of choice”
(Rancière, 1991, p. 54). In speaking of will and intelligence in terms of separation, it is tempting to understand them as faculties, as powers within the human subject that could be developed through effective pedagogical methods. But Rancière does not seem to understand the will as solely a faculty. In fact, in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* Rancière gives several definitions of the will, starting with Jacotot’s own definition:

> By the will we mean that self-reflection by the reasonable being who knows himself in the act. It is the threshold of rationality, this consciousness of and esteem for the self as a reasonable being acting that nourishes the movement of the intelligence. (Rancière, 1991, p. 57)

Two things are especially interesting in this quote. Firstly, Jacotot links will to a form of self-reflection, an attention to the self in the performance of a specific activity. Secondly, this self-reflection is pre-epistemological, since it lingers on the threshold of rationality. So willing is not an action carried out through rational deliberation but rather a self-reflective emergence on the verge of rationality. Rancière then goes further by placing the will in between persons, making it into a relational phenomenon rather than a faculty of a singular subject. Intellectual emancipation is therefore not the result of an intellectual achievement but of a volitional relation. This volitional relation is characterized by an openness toward both the object(s) of interest and any epistemological rationality that frames this/these object(s). The will is not the rational choice between different means to a pre-given end but a power to be moved in relation to both the other and the interest of the other. This movement is not a mere reaction, however; it is more a willing that is characterized by an attending toward the other will, creating a relational sphere where both willing and attending become a common affair. Here, the volitional traits of the educational relation are thus closely linked to questions of attention rather than questions of intention. The ignorant schoolmaster can only demand from the students that they work hard and attentively and that they speak of this work: “The ignorant must demand from his student that he prove to him that he has studied attentively” (Rancière, 1991, p. 31).
The Relation of Wills as an Attentive Relation

The work of the emancipated is the work of translation, of making something of the arbitrariness of language (Rancière, 1991, p. 70). For Rancière, emancipation is the experience of learning and the sharing of this experience (Rancière, 1991, p. 70). As soon as a man “knows what moved him, he can practise moving others if he studies the choice and use of the means of communication. It’s a language he has to learn” (Rancière, 1991, p. 67). These are the words of Jacotot. For him, a thought is never told in truth but verified in practice, in a translational process of intelligences and wills trying to figure each other out. It is the arbitrariness of language that forces people to communicate and to form communities:

People are united because they are people, that is to say, distant beings. Language doesn’t unite them. On the contrary, it is the arbitrariness of language that makes them try to communicate by forcing them to translate—but also puts them in a community of intelligence. (Rancière, 1991, p. 58)

The question is how to communicate an experience without explaining it. To Rancière it is “the unconditional tension of the translator that opens up the possibility of the other tension, the other will” (Rancière, 1991, p. 70). To Rancière, there exist two forms of willing—the perverted will, a will connected to rhetoric, truth claims, and stultification, and the reasonable will, connected to openness, attention, and “the exteriority of the linguistic order” (Rancière, 1991, p. 82). This exteriority, which lies outside of reason, consists of matter and linguistic signs and can be traversed by a reasonable will that can tell a story and make others “feel the ways in which we are similar to them” (Rancière, 1991, p. 71).

If James (1890/1950) saw the human will as an ability to pay attention to one’s inner conflicting tendencies and to focus on the one tendency that is in accordance with one’s greater plan, Rancière’s will could be seen as an ability to pay attention to conflicting world views or perspectives that emerge through interpersonal relations. Communication, to Rancière, is therefore not to be considered a sharing of understanding but rather a sharing of misunderstanding and difference. The reasonable will is thus a way of attending to how that
which is being said is ordering or reordering a realm of sensibility by keeping an openness to possible ruptures in the (material) fabric of discourse:

One need only play the radical exteriority of the linguistic order against the exteriority of reason. The reasonable will, guided by its distant link with the truth and by its desire to speak with those like it, controls that exteriority, regains it through the force of attention. (Rancière, 1991, p. 82)

The Aesthetic Implications of the Relation of Wills

In the introductory chapter it was stated that the word *attention* could mean, among other things, the act of listening to or looking at or thinking about something/somebody carefully. Tracing its Latin roots in other languages, one finds other meanings, such as waiting (French: *attendre*) or stretching out (Latin: *attendere*). Connotations that associate attention with both activity and passivity make the term a linguistic reminder of the difficulties of making a (purely logical) distinction between the two. In the term *attention*, passivity and activity are entangled and intertwined, which creates problems when one speaks about teaching in terms of showing and viewing. This problematic is addressed by Rancière (2011) in the book *The Emancipated Spectator*. According to Rancière, the unclear distinction between activity and passivity creates problems for artists/teachers when they discuss the role of spectators/students or try to reform theater/education. Furthermore, as a teacher, it is not hard to read the relationship between artist and spectator as a pedagogical relationship—which is made explicit by Rancière himself in some parts of the text. So, apart from just comparing the spectacle with educational relations, the educational relation in itself can be read as a spectacle.

Politics and aesthetics are elsewhere defined by Rancière (2006, p. 96) as configurations of a specific space—as the distinction of a sphere of experience. This sphere consists of, on the one hand, objects that are defined as being common and being ruled by the same decisions and, on the other hand, subjects that are recognized as having the means to articulate and to discuss those objects. The political/aesthetic activity of changing this configuration Rancière refers to as partitioning of the
sensible (in French, *le partage du sensible*). The possibilities of education to reconfigure, or redistribute, ways of seeing, thinking, and doing makes it both a political and an aesthetic activity. If education is seen as a very special arena, an arena where there has been given time and place to discuss and to “put things on the table” in order for something new and unexpected to begin (Masschelein & Simons, 2013, pp. 92–93), it might be possible to talk of an aesthetics of the educational relation characterized by a partitioning of the sensible.

In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Rancière (2011) introduces the spectator by placing him at the heart of the discussion of the relation between art and politics. Spectacle is, to Rancière, bodies in action in front of an audience (and in my reading, the teacher qualifies as a body of action in front of an audience made up of the students). For the censurers of theater (Plato being the most famous, according to Rancière), being a spectator is bad for two reasons: the spectator is ignorant and passive and becomes separated from the capacity to know and the power to act. This means that theater is bad by definition, since it is a scene of illusion and passivity, or that theater is bad just because it will never be able to escape its relation to the spectator as passive or ignorant. In an educational setting based on explications and representations, the student also becomes a spectator, a spectator who is taught that knowledge is first and foremost a position. In this setting the student is again and again taught his or her own inability, which confirms the inequality of intelligence set up by the teacher. In an emancipatory setting, this inequality is refuted by an ignorant schoolmaster who might know a great many things but who renounces the knowledge of ignorance, uncouples mastery from knowledge, and demands that the students seek out their own paths.

Rancière writes that any attempt to reform educational practices that has an intention to abolish the distance between spectacle and spectator presupposes an understanding of a certain partitioning of the sensible that has set out false logical oppositions between viewing/knowing, appearance/reality, and activity/passivity. The spectator is thus discredited in advance. Before emancipation can occur, these false oppositions must be dealt with:
Emancipating begins when the opposition between viewing and acting is challenged, when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relation between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection. (Rancière, 2011, p. 13)

The problem with artists (and stultifying pedagogues) is that, while they want to abolish the distance between the spectator/student, they also claim to know and define the distance that should be abolished. In the emancipatory relation, there is nothing to be transmitted, neither from the master to the student nor from the artist to the spectator. There is, however, a third thing, something in between, owned by no one, something which excludes any uniform transmission, any identity of cause and effect. By introducing this third thing, the emancipatory relation becomes a matter of attention, as it demands from its participants that they actively search out an object of common interest, even if this object escapes a common definition or interpretation. Rancière speaks of a communal power that is not the constructed and sought-for relation between the bodies on stage and the bodies in the audience (or, regarding the educational relation, between the teacher and the students) and the sense of sharing the same event. To him the power of the community lies in the power of the equality of intelligences that allows for everyone to make up a unique event of their own. What is shared can thus be said to be the sharing per se. This capacity of the anonymous, the power of associating and dissociating, is also a power of attention. To Rancière (2011), the subject is always a spectator, and every spectator is already an actor in his or her own story. Emancipation is the blurring of the boundary between those who act and those who look, between the individuals and the community. In order for this blurring to not be a distractive event that disturbs the instrumental logics of educational institutions, it must be noticed or brought to attention. It therefore must be addressed.

To Rancière there is almost a membrane-like link between politics and aesthetics, as both activities flesh out possible ways of doing, seeing, and thinking. Politics and aesthetics are activities that intertwine the relation between, for example, artists/spectators and teachers/students, making both parts equally active in the partitioning of a
sensible realm. Paying attention to this realm is a way of shifting focus from rhetoric (as a means to pursue educational goals) to aesthetics (as a means to question the very meaning of education). This in its turn makes room for the emancipatory potential of the educational relation, without one having to completely let go of the normative traits of education or its responsibilities for otherness. From a relational perspective, *le partage du sensible* is a powerful image for the educational relation. The experience of this relation becomes a result of the attention to and the enunciation of differences that are part of all educational relations *qua* emancipatory relations.

Viewing becomes active if we see it as a transformation of this partitioning of positions. It is possible to be a distant spectator and an active interpreter at the same time. Ingold (2001), in a critique of education understood as the transmission of representations, stresses the notion of *showing* as presenting rather than representing or explicating, as making someone able to *attend*, firsthand, where any specific learning comes after attending. Ingold (2001, p. 142) contrasts the two conceptions by describing the former as “filling up” and the latter as “tuning up” the students. Lewis (2009) claims that, with Rancière, the educational relation is established through a disidentification between the teacher and the student and thus calls for a reworking of the “pedagogical aesthetics of vision” in order to “resist the reproduction of the stultifying gaze” (Lewis, 2009, p. 293). To Lewis this means that the authoritarian gaze of the stultifying pedagogue must transform into an “interactive gesture of the glance.” This interactive glance would be the work of an attention that is not fixed on a certain object but open to the unpredictable possibilities of the educational relation. Following Rancière, a student as spectator creates his or her own poem from what is presented (see Säfström, 2014). Emancipation is what turns attention into something that is shared and constituted in the act of teaching. Intellectual emancipation could therefore be understood as an event of or at least an invitation to attention formation.
Concluding Discussion

The purpose of this chapter has been to explore the meaning and significance of teaching as the summoning of attentive subjects. In the chapter I have stressed the relational traits of the notion of teaching as a summons to self-activity (Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit) by examining Fichte’s notion of Aufforderung, where a subject becomes a self-aware subject only in the presence of another human being who summons the subject to act. From an educational perspective, the consequences are that if a subject is called upon to act in a certain way, this call is first and foremost a call that brings the subject into presence in a world of other human beings. These human beings both enable and constrain the freedom of the summoned subject. Die Aufforderung, or the summons, can therefore be thought of as an invitation to the subject to become an attentive subject, attending to itself and to the world. Rancière’s notion of intellectual emancipation could be seen as an aesthetic summons to self-activity, where the focus is on the attending activity of the subject rather than on the self that performs this activity. An event of intellectual emancipation can thus be seen as a summons to self-activity that does not constrain the integrity of the subject but invites the subject, as an attentive subject, to self-actively (i.e., self-attentively) come forth in a world of plurality and difference.

Rancière’s discussions focus not only on the activity of attending but also on the relational aspects of that very activity. His notion of equality as a relation of (reasonable) wills makes it possible to found teaching on aesthetic/political rather than epistemological grounds. The relation between teacher, student, and subject matter constitutes the activity of teaching as an activity that moves on the borders of “the radical exteriority of the linguistic order” (Rancière, 1991, p. 82), an order over which it retains control “through the force of attention” (Rancière, 1991, p. 82). The summoning of the attentive subject can therefore be regarded as the summoning of an attentive relation, the quality and character of which can depend on, for example, the intentionality of the subjects and the context in which the relation comes to life. Yet to explore are the meaning of teaching as an activity set up around “the radical exteriority of the linguistic order” and the kind of
attention that is formed through this activity. This shifts the focus toward the principle of *Bildsamkeit*, which is the theme of the following chapter.
7. The Aesthetics of Bildsamkeit

Teaching is a relational complex that is characterized by the activities of showing and observing and can, as such, be regarded as a series of events that summon subjects into self-activity. These activities can be replaced, through the discussions of Rancière, by their aesthetic/political analogues, presenting and translating, which bring to the fore the unique attending subject that is summoned to act. By specifically addressing the asymmetric and unpredictable traits of educational practices, teaching—as an event of gestures of pointing out—is not a unidirectional affair, for every participant in this event has the (at least theoretical) possibility of influencing the other participants. Furthermore, with Biesta’s (2009, 2014) specific notion of education as a multi-dimensional practice that works in the three functional domains of qualification, socialization, and subjectification, teaching, which works in the intersection of all three of these domains, can be said to be a sporadic event, one in which students respond to and acknowledge the new that is brought into the situation. From a radical relational perspective, the teaching event is thus something that is created and shaped by all participants in the event, and this in relation to a specific
content. As an educational phenomenon, attention is therefore more than a prerequisite for performing schoolwork: as a relation between students, teachers, and subject matter, it is integral to the assertion and formation of subjectivity (Masschelein & Simons 2013), to the becoming of subjects (see, e.g., Sobe, 2014), and to the self-activity of those subjects (see chapter 6).

In the previous chapter this educational notion of attention was developed through the educational principle of the summons to self-activity (Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit). There, I elaborated on the notion of teaching as a summons of (attentive) subjects, drawing on Fichte’s and Rancière’s discussions on Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit and intellectual emancipation, respectively. Both discussions pointed toward the possibilities of formulating an aesthetic conception of the teaching practice in which a summons could function as an invitation to engage in an attentive relation without someone or something constraining or framing the integrity of the attending subject. Rather, the subject was invited to engage in an attentive relation and to become a person through the relation. In this chapter I explore the educational characteristics of this relation, mainly through a discussion of the principle of Bildsamkeit in relation the notion of attention as a form of aesthetic relation to the surrounding world, a relation that can be established and/or developed in the teaching practice.

Attention, framed as a qualitative educational relation, is something that both informs and is formed in the practice of teaching. Through Rancière, I will provide an aesthetic and situation-specific interpretation of Bildsamkeit in order to connect it with the notion of teaching as attention formation. At the end of the chapter the relation between the summons to self-activity and Bildsamkeit will once again be addressed, this time in relation to Rancière’s discussions on aesthetics and his notion of le partage du sensible, which provide an image in which the Bildsamkeit of the attentive subject is summoned in an aesthetic space that is initiated and fueled by the activity of teaching.

In the chapter I will turn to the phenomenon of curiosity, drawing on Lewis (2012) and Rancière (1991, 2006, 2011/2013), among others. Curiosity, as a sensational and non-epistemic relation to the world is what makes intellectual emancipation possible, according to Lewis
Through the aesthetic interpretation of Bildsamkeit put forth in this chapter, the political dissensus of Rancière will add to the notion of teaching as attention formation in that it will both set up aesthetic and rational limits to the teacher’s educational intentions and call these limits into question.

**Relational Interpretations of Bildsamkeit**

A radical relational perspective on education and teaching disconnects the principle of Bildsamkeit from its connotations of providing the possibilities for forming individuals or citizens in unidirectional, hierarchical, and teleological educational processes. However, this perspective brings other problematic aspects into the picture. It is possible to interpret Bildsamkeit as a field of transformative experiences emerging through the co-active aspects of the practice of teaching. These experiences are not necessarily smooth and harmonious, partly since humans live in the world with their (different) bodies and subjectivities, which produce frictions and fissures that cannot or maybe should not be mended (as it could lead to a violent overcoming of difference).

As was discussed in chapter four, educability was, for Herbart, the foundational category of education, that which made education possible. Siljander (2012) says that Herbart’s notion of Bildsamkeit both refutes the idea that education as a science should be derived from other more foundational sciences such as psychology and philosophy and refutes Kant’s notions of natural causality and rational freedom. Unlike other Bildung-theorists, Herbart did not consider self-formation to be a natural human disposition but something that requires education (Siljander, 2012). Furthermore, Herbart’s Bildsamkeit, according to Siljander, is from the beginning a relational category through which one can understand (a) the human subject as incomplete and (b) pedagogical action as an intervention through which this subject can pursue its self-formation: “Educability takes shape in the intersection between the growth process of the growing person and the educational action of the educator” (Siljander, 2012, p. 94).
In his reading of Herbart’s notion of educability and also drawing on Benner’s discussions on the matter, Siljander (2012) understands educability as something other than a constructivist ideal or an auto-poetic principle through which a human subject learns or forms itself out of pure experience in a pre-given social context; he sees it as something that constantly changes in the interaction between an educator and an educated with the possibility of changing the very same context. Therefore, Bildsamkeit can be read as an aesthetic/political category, close to the way Rancière understands intellectual emancipation and disensus. As we have seen, Rancière makes attention into a central element in the process of intellectual emancipation, as he describes it as the result of an equal relation between two reasonable wills. By reasonable will he means a will that pays attention to the radical exteriority of the linguistic order, but he does not elaborate any further. So, how can this “attention to the radical exteriority of the linguistic order” be understood? In other words, what kind of quality of attention is at work in the event of intellectual emancipation? Here, Fichte’s discussions become helpful. The relational interpretation and understanding of the relation between the subject and the world can also be found in Fichte’s notion of the principle of Aufforderung. According to Kivelä (2012), Fichte’s self-active subject refers to “the action carried out by the embodied individual actor,” which, Kivelä says, “on the one hand relates itself to the finitudes and limitations set by entities in the world of objects, and on the other hand relates to freedom based on the indefinite spontaneity of an I” (Kivelä, 2012, p. 77).

In Wood’s reading of Fichte, the materiality of the surrounding world is an element in relation to which the subject only becomes a subject through its striving against the very same world:

An active I “finds itself” (to use a favorite expression of Fichte in this connection, SW 3:33; 4:18–21, GA 4:2:181–182) only as willing (SW 4:18), and its willing takes the form of a striving against a material world on which it acts, and to which it is at the same time also passive. (Wood, 2006)

By interpreting Fichte’s willing subject as a bodily constitution that extends into the material world, one comes closer to a more situation- and place-specific notion of subjectivity. Not only the willing but the
subject as being comes forth in a striving against the materiality of the world. The key words here are *striving* and *against*, since they point to the fact that a subject can only become a subject if there is something or someone other who not only summons and provokes this subject’s self-assertion and self-activity but also forms the limits for this self-assertion and self-activity.

Regarding the practice of teaching, I have earlier brought up the complex relations between educational functions and purposes by referring to Biesta’s three domains: qualification, socialization, and subjectification. Although these domains help in an explanatory way to highlight both the practical and theoretical challenges that everyone who works within the educational system has to face, they also make it easy to separate important questions that might better be discussed together. If one only talks about socialization, for instance, one easily ends up in questions regarding identity, culture, and intersectionality. If one talks only about qualification, one easily ends up in questions about learning outcomes, assessment, and employability. And if one speaks about subjectification only in relation to emancipation and the becoming of unique persons, it is easy to neglect the domains of qualification and socialization, which can be said to provide the concrete settings for the event of subjectification. When discussed in relation to the practice of teaching, subjectification gains a substance that makes it possible to discuss it in more concrete terms. When Biesta discusses teaching as the bringing about of radical difference, this “difference” can be regarded in the teaching context as the subject matter of subjectification, whether in the form of subjectivity, enactment, or presentation. Attention formation is a configuration of relations through which formation of subjectivity becomes linked to the aesthetic event of teaching, where subject matter, in every possible form it may be presented or enacted, becomes something that matters for the attentive subject, who is summoned in the event of teaching. With a relational interpretation of the principle of the summons to self-activity, subjectivity becomes linked to otherness and difference, since a subject becomes a (self-active) subject only in response to the other’s otherness that both enables and sets the limits for the potential forms of its self-activity. With the notion of *Bildsamkeit*, an educational relation can be
thought of as an event in which a subject, in relation to a teacher and some kind of content, is given an opportunity to transform/translate into a future subject. One thinker who has explored this event is Lewis (2012), who claims that Rancière, though not explaining it explicitly nor always in relation to the notion of intellectual emancipation, has more to say about attention. To Lewis, an important element in the event of intellectual emancipation is curiosity. It is also through the notion of curiosity that one moves closer to a Rancièrian notion of Bildsamkeit.

**Curiosity**

The Canadian writer Manguel (2015) states that curiosity is a word with a twofold meaning. On one hand, a curioso is a person who treats something with “particular care and diligence,” and on the other hand, a curioso might also labor to “scrutinize things that are most hidden and reserved, and do not matter” (Manguel, 2015, p. 13). For example, from a religious point of view it was not always considered a good thing to inquire into the antinomies of holy stories and myths because some things should not be brought up to be explored or examined. This twofold meaning can have to do with curiosity as a term that describes a relationship with both sides of the border that is the limit between the known and the unknown. Manguel states that curiosity as an inclination of passing this border is not considered a good thing to some people, especially those of the church or the state. On the one hand, to deal with what is not known can be seen as dealing with the nonsensical, and curiosity is therefore something pointless, of no use or meaning. On the other hand, dealing with the unknown can also lead to new knowledge, and curiosity can therefore be dangerous to those who claim to own knowledge or to those who consider themselves to be the ones who should define what is good or bad knowledge (Manguel, 2015).

Lewis (2012) defines curiosity as the establishment of a non-epistemological relationship with an object or a subject matter, which he describes as a “pre-reflective sensorial openness to disturbances that exist prior to any imaginative organization” (Lewis, 2012, p. 111). This way of approaching curiosity makes it into an essential element of the
event of intellectual emancipation, since it seems that if there is no curiosity, the attentive subject summoned by an ignorant schoolmaster will not answer to the summons, at least not in a transformative manner. Now, Lewis suggests that it is curiosity rather than will that enables the students of Jacotot to “sustain attention to the text and subsequently translate it through performance” (Lewis, 2012, p. 107). This way of connecting curiosity to the practice of study makes curiosity into an overlooked dimension of the will, where willing is not a will-to-power, a will-to-will, which through technology separates humans from an authentic being-in-the world, and neither is curiosity a non-willing (or Gelassenheit) that remains outside of the domain of will altogether (see Heidegger, 1966; Arendt, 1981; Davis, 2007). To Lewis curiosity is rather “a will that enacts the ‘as if…’ of democratic dissensus by playing an illegitimate role in the scandalous and illicit drama of equality” (Lewis, 2012, p. 108). By introducing the enactment of the “as if…” as an important element in an educational relation, Lewis opens up a space where the teaching practice becomes a realm where subjectification is possible, without the attentive subject or its self-activity being denied.

Referring to Thomas of Aquinas’s elaboration on Saint Augustine’s warnings of the dangers of wanting to know everything there is to know in the world, Manguel lists four concerns regarding the dangers or “perversions” of human curiosity. The first is pride, the second is the pursuit of “lesser matters,” the third is study of the world without reference to God, and the fourth is the study of things that are beyond the limits of our individual intelligence. In relation to Aquinas’s fourth remark against the dangers of curiosity, Rancière’s discussions on teaching and of the community become highly relevant: Rancière speaks of intellectual emancipation in relation to a community of spectators translating presentations of some content under the assumption of the radical equality of intelligence. In these discussions there is no clear and distinct limit to human intelligence, since intelligence is a collective and aesthetic experience of sharing differences in the event of emancipated spectatorship (see also Säfström, 2012). In relation to curiosity, one could say that curiosity is the enactment of the attentive will, the will that pays attention to the
radical exteriority of the linguistic order, or, as Lewis (2012, p. 104) puts it, “When we are curious, intelligence is embodied in a new sensorium.”

I will discuss this further by connecting the question of emancipation to the question of the object of attention (the content), the attentive subjects (the community of spectators), and the activity of translation.

**Curiosity, the Content, and the Community**

Two important elements in the event of intellectual emancipation are the content that is the focus of attention and the community that is drawn into the sphere of spectatorship. The significance of the content and its relation to a community of spectators has been brought to the fore by Masschelein and Simons (2013) in a discussion of education as an event of formation. Formation, to them, is the process of an I that transcends itself through an event where the world, through an object of study, opens so that the I becomes a new or an altered I in relation to this world. In relation to the notion of emancipated spectatorship, one could speak of a process in which the I becomes an attentive subject.

The importance and significance of the community is developed in relation to what Masschelein and Simons (2013) refer to as the scholastic experience. This experience emanates from the event where a teacher addresses a whole group of students and in that way addresses everyone and no one at the same time. The group becomes a community in the very teaching act as it is being addressed as a community with a shared interest. This interest calls for attention in a way that the community is able to pay attention:

Formation has to do with the orientation of students to the world as it is made to exist in the subject or in the subject-matter, and this orientation primarily has to do with attention and interest for the world and, likewise, attention and interest for the self in relation to that world. (Masschelein & Simons, 2013, pp. 44–45)

Cornelissen (2010), who has looked into Rancière’s notion of teaching, argues that an event of shared attention can be attained by an ignorant
schoolmaster who keeps the door closed and exposes students to a thing in common that neither the teacher nor the students possess by themselves. By assuming an equality of intelligence and demanding that everyone exercise their will and attention to this object, teaching becomes a way of defying the laws of gravity, which in the public place of the school is the material pull of the social order (Cornelissen, 2010). This turns the teaching event into an event of (attentive) translation, as a manifold of self-active transformations of presentations. Here Lewis suggests that it is curiosity that enables students to sustain their attention to an object of study so they can translate it through an enactment of the “as if.” Lewis stresses the fact that an ignorant schoolmaster does not place an object on the table with a hidden or sought-for educational agenda. Instead the teacher inserts a void (by pointing toward a dislocation) into the object that calls for further investigation. This kind of intervention is what Rancière calls dissensus, meaning that something or someone breaks with the existing order and re-orders the sensible realm. In the former chapter, the summoning of an attentive subject was described, partly through Rancière’s discussions on education, politics, and aesthetics, as an event of subjectification, or a dissensus, where a sensible realm is reordered when someone who does not count in the then-current order speaks with that someone’s own voice. Rancière writes the following on the relation between education and dissensus:

Such, it seems to me, is the lesson that we draw from this particular dissonance affirmed at the very onset of the modern educational-social machine. Equality is enacted within the social machine through dissensus. And dissensus is not primarily a quarrel, but is a gap in the very configuration of sensible concepts, a dissociation introduced into the correspondence between ways of being and ways of doing, seeing and speaking. (Rancière, 2010, p.15)

The dissensus can be regarded as an attempt to conceptualize or at least delve into the educative aspects of the disharmony generated through the hardships of transformative experiences. The intervention is therefore both political, because it translates the noise of the uncounted to voices, and aesthetic, because it reorders and introduces new ways of speaking, seeing, and thinking. To Lewis it thus creates a free space for curious investigation by the attending subjects:
Curiosity circles the void from the side, constantly stumbling around along its edge. Here, in the atopic zone, the student must go see for him or herself. … The process of verifying the will is thus dependent upon an aesthetic interruption in the field of perception, which splits sense, exposing the subject to an excess that has not been accounted for. (Lewis, 2012, p. 109)

If one reads the above quote from a teaching perspective, one can see how teaching potentially could create an atopic zone, where students are left to exercise their will and attention through a curiosity constantly fueled by the teacher or, more specifically, by the relation between the teacher, the students, and the zone itself (curiosity as a means between attention and will alludes to a possible link between the summons to self-activity and Bildsamkeit).

**Translation as an Enactment of Curiosity**

In a community of spectators the partitioning of the sensible realm becomes a sharing of different worldviews, where each view adds to this disturbance, making it a contingent reality in which things, utterances, and appearances belong to everyone to translate through the use of attention. In relation to the notion of translation, it is important to note that a translation can never be a one-to-one transformation. Anyone who has tried to translate a sentence between two languages knows that the words cannot just be replaced with the use of a dictionary. What has to be translated is the meaning of the sentence, and the meaning can be more or less difficult to grasp. Benjamin (1923/2009) wrote in his essay *The Task of the Translator* that the true meaning of a text can only be felt in the distant void between the two versions, the original and the translation, and that a well-performed translation always adds to the original meaning of a text (Holy Scripture being the only exception). Lewis writes:

> The three attending paradigms of translation—and thus the three modalities through which the equality of intelligence is verified—include learning the mother tongue, the freedom of the written word to circulate and the ability of objects to create an equal playing field between subjects. (Lewis, 2012, p. 103)
To translate is to exercise a disciplined freedom, where the attentive subject orients him- or herself in an attentive field of contingent meaning. Rancière states that “expressions that sensibly translate movements in thought and nuance of feeling must be replaced by the direct relation between the forces of the soul and a certain number of material elements” (2011/2013, p. 117). In the text *L’image intolerable* Rancière shows how this summoning of curious attention can take form as one looks at a specific photograph:

Elle produit ainsi peut-être un déplacement de l’affect usé de l’indignation à un affect plus discret, un affect à effet indéterminé, la curiosité, le désir de voir de plus près. Je parle ici de curiosité, j’ai parlé plus haut d’attention. Ce sont là en effet des affects qui brouillent les fausses évidences des schémas stratégiques; ce sont des disposition du corps et de l’esprit où l’œil ne sait pas par avance ce qu’il voit ni la pensée ce qu’elle doit en faire. (Rancière, 2008, p.114)

The photo of which Rancière speaks is taken from a series of photos by Ristelhueber called “WB” (West Bank) in which all, rather than being typical representations of violence, are focused on details that might or might not be evidence of the harsh reality of living on the West Bank. In commenting on the photo, Rancière elaborates on and refutes Barthes’ distinction between *punctum* and *studium*. These are two forms of looking at and interpreting photographs, where the former is connected to the factual aspects of the photo and the latter is connected to the affective aspects of the photo. Rancière claims that a photo in itself can invite a way of looking that lingers between *punctum* and *studium*, between activity and passivity. This way of looking is more based on a specific form of curiosity and attention that is not epistemologically grounded but rather has an aesthetic sense of non-closure, which evokes both attention and curiosity. In the photos by Ristelhueber, Rancière discusses the way the themes are neither factual nor affective and, because of this, invoke the curiosity of the viewer that can self-actively explore, translate, and make something out of the theme.

By diffusing the relation between the *punctum* and the *studium*, the relation between representation and presentation also gets diffused. If teaching is understood as a set of instructive gestures or objects that should represent and transmit bits and pieces of a fixed knowledge (of
some subject matter or of the world in general), it becomes a sort of consolidation of *punctum* and *studium*. In that way, teaching becomes an enactment of the *there-is*, something that establishes a fixed and ready truth. The content that is brought in front of the students is what it is. However, with Rancière it is suggested that there is the possibility that teaching takes place in a community of spectators who together translate the content, fueled by a curiosity that is based on neither epistemic desires nor affective urges. Thus it would escape the totalitarian claims being made by the non-contingencies of the *there-is*.

**Rancière’s Aesthetic Bildsamkeit**

Rancière’s aesthetics delve not into discussions of the beautiful but into the way art and other appearances and perceptible forms can redistribute a sensible realm and evoke new ways of seeing, speaking, thinking, and doing. Lewis talks about an “aesthetic seizure”, which could possibly (but of course not necessarily) bring about some kind of ethical awakening. From that perspective one could say that it is not that easy to separate the ethical from the aesthetic. Lewis can be said to explore the ethical dimensions of this “aesthetic seizure.” His way of doing this goes through an examination of the differences between Freire’s and Rancière’s discussions of the relation between aesthetics and emancipation. Lewis (2012) sees the curiosity of Rancière as a response to the event of subjectification. He describes the event of subjectification as an event in which someone is called into presence in a disruptive fissure in what, before the event, seemed to be the realm of the sensible. This enables subjects to stumble into a void where they are provoked to see for themselves and to execute their attention through the power of curiosity. Lewis claims that this makes Rancière’s curiosity a generative and creative aesthetic gesture, rather than the clarifying aesthetics of Freire. Both notions of aesthetics have emancipatory outcomes, but Freire’s aesthetics is, according to Lewis, a means to a very specific emancipatory aim—namely, class knowledge.

Lewis’ way of depicting an aesthetic educational encounter differs from, for example, Dewey’s (1934/1980) notion of the aesthetic side of
education in the way the attentive subject takes part in the constitution of an aesthetic field rather than having an aesthetic experience of seeing the world with new eyes. The aesthetic experience is not an experience of something external to democratic education that has to be brought into education, for it is immanent to it (Lewis, 2012, p. 9). Lewis refers to Panagia’s concept *somacognition*, which he describes as a pre-reflective “sensorial openness to disturbances that exist prior to any imaginative organization” (Lewis, 2012, p. 111).

In chapter three’s discussion of some philosophical/educational approaches to attention, Noddings (1984, 2010) was brought up as an important contributor to a relational understanding of attention. In her discussions on *caring* she makes a point of separating the aesthetic from the ethical by discussing engrossment (i.e., attention) as either a relation to animals, things, or ideas (aesthetic caring) or a relation to other human beings (ethical caring). Both relations are similar in that they both produce a displacement of motivation, or attentional shift, but this displacement is, to Noddings, not enough of an ethical criterion. As an example, Noddings (1984) refers to monstrous people throughout history who, despite their evil characters, can nevertheless take an interest in art. Here, Noddings seems to connect aesthetics with the notion of the beautiful. Her refutation of an aesthetic interpersonal relation is based on the fact that evil people can appreciate objective beauty. What Lewis himself and through his interpretation of Rancière is doing is opening up an educational space that works as a parallel universe to that of asymmetry-based and teleological notions of teaching practice. To that extent, Lewis’s notion of curiosity and the relational space it opens up is similar to what Conroy (in Todd, 2015) refers to as a liminal space, a space that functions as a horizon of possibilities that is often blurred or ruled out in the everyday business of teaching and learning. Todd (2015) suggests that one speak of these liminal spaces as pedagogical spaces by bracketing out the educational (i.e., goal-oriented and intentional aspects embedded in the teaching practice) and focusing on how these spaces, through their material and corporeal characteristics, enable personal and existential transformations. What Todd can be said to do is separate the principle of the summons to self-activity from the principle of *Bildsamkeit*,
connecting the former to the intentional sides of education and the latter to the transformational sides of education. With the notion of curiosity, another relationship between the two principles emerges, a relationship where transformation is always the reaction to a call or an invitation that comes from “outside,” although this outside does not have to be materialized in the figure of the teacher only but can also emerge from an instantaneous configuration of the teacher/student/subject-matter triad (see also Silius-Ahonen, 2012).

The risks of teaching are due to both the ethical implications of the summoning and the ethical risks of the self-activity that the summons promotes. While it is important to address the transformative and creative potential of educational practices, it is also important to acknowledge the destructive elements that linger in those very same practices. With and through Rancière’s (2011), Manguel’s (2015), and Lewis’s (2012) accounts of curiosity, one finds a form of attention that is on the verge of passivity and activity and that can be both destructive and constructive. One important figure in relation to this two-sided notion of attention is thus the teacher. In relation to education as a summons to self-activity and Bildsamkeit, the interesting thing is not curiosity per se but curiosity in relation to the aesthetic implications of intellectual emancipation. These implications make it possible to understand educational events, such as those enacted in the teaching practice, as being constituted by both summoning and responding to otherness, where the otherness does not have to be provided by the teacher but could be an object of art or a discussion on justice and where the teachers role is to invoke a curiosity that pushes the borders of the reasonable realm. Otherness is what is enacted in and through the event of teaching. Teaching is what checks the boundaries of the reasonable by being a common affair in that it concerns curiosity, not for one but for many.

**Concluding Discussion**

In this chapter I have explored attention as a relational quality between a subject and its surroundings. This was based on the assumption that a subject becomes a subject in relation to something or someone but also
that the subject *qua* attentive subject is called into presence through a summons to self-activity—something that was more thoroughly explored in the previous chapter. Drawing on those conclusions, wherein an attentive subject could be summoned by an ignorant schoolmaster in order to pursue his or her intellectual emancipation, the focus in this chapter has been directed toward the forms of attention at work as the attentive subject also becomes an active subject.

With teaching understood as a co-existential and triadic relation, the encounter with otherness and difference plays a great role in the summoning and self-activity of the attentive and attending subjects of the educational relation. As the argument has developed—from first having put forth teaching as a summoning of attentive subjects and then as an activity of responding to this summons through specific ways of relating to the surrounding world—it has traversed a theoretical territory that connects the principle of the summons to self-activity (*Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit*) with the principle of *Bildsamkeit*. This movement is not one-dimensional, since both principles presuppose a relational perspective on educational activities. In order for the attentive subject to conquer the world, it must simultaneously attend to itself—a struggle in which the objects of the surrounding world work as both enabling and disabling devices. Thus argues Sobe (2004), who draws on Montessori’s theorization of attention in linking subjectivity to different ways of engaging with the (physical) world:

> Things (*qua* things) that are to be manipulated, touched, and thus learned through construct subjectivity. They represent strategies for organizing human perception that rely upon a theorization of attention as deliberate, cultivated, and affirmative of certain truths about the subject. (Sobe, 2004, p. 297)

While Sobe focuses on the enabling aspects of these relations, in relation to subjectivity the relations themselves can, as has been shown, bring about possibilities for subjectification (in a Rancièrean sense). In this chapter I have addressed the aesthetic aspects of *Bildsamkeit*, here interpreted as a specific educational relation that summons and brings about attentive and self-active subjects. The discussion has put forth *curiosity* as an important component in the aesthetic notion of teaching as attention formation. This component enabled an approach to teaching
that turned it into an aesthetic praxis that did not try to do away with either the relational traits of educational practices or the ethical and epistemic limits constituted by those traits.

While the active sides of attention can be problematized (see, e.g., James, 1890/1950; Noddings, 2010; Todd, 2003), at least as they were instrumentally implemented/promoted in educational settings, there were other notions of active attention that were worthwhile exploring. Those notions are found in Rancière’s works on intellectual emancipation and aesthetics, especially when combining them, as Lewis does, with his discussions on *curiosity*. Through those discussions, it is possible to motivate the actions put forth by an attentive subject without the need for a hierarchy of wills to replace a hierarchy of intelligences. Curiosity is not something that takes its power from a set of epistemological truths about a certain part of the world, a certain area of knowledge, or a certain subject matter in order for someone to see things more clearly and speak about them with rigor. It is a curiosity that, if stimulated, lets the attentive subject enter these parts as a stranger with the potential to develop a genuine interest (inter-esse) that transforms the curiosity into possible inquiry. In the event of a dissensus, where a fissure in the sensible realm transforms objects, utterances, and appearances into a translatable materiality, the attentive subject need only execute the power of curiosity in the name of equality.
PART IV: Teaching as Attention Formation
8. Teaching as Attention Formation

As a relational phenomenon, attention is an important aspect of the summons to self-activity and Bildsamkeit and the tension between the two. The former principle is related to the notion of education as the process of becoming human among other humans. The latter principle is connected to the ways in which incompleteness and pedagogical action are constantly developing in relation to the self-formation and self-activity of the attending subject. Starting from the triadic relational notion of teaching and the educational principles of summons to self-activity and Bildsamkeit, I have explored the event of teaching as an event of attention formation, mainly by drawing on Rancière’s educational, political, and aesthetic discussions. With teaching thought of as a summons, an educational relation could be considered as an event of attention formation that in an event of summoning to self-activity would enfold as a situation- and place-specific Bildsamkeit. This would make attention into a significant educational phenomenon. In this chapter I present my main theoretical contributions. First, I will connect my Rancièrian reading of attention to the principles of the summons to self-activity and Bildsamkeit. Second, I will concretize this reading from a Didaktik perspective. Having presented these theoretical contributions, I will discuss at the end of the chapter the limits of the
Rancièrian aesthetics and suggest how it could be further developed through Irigaray’s (1993) notion of a sexed morphology.

**Theoretical Contributions**

Educational theory that acknowledges the relational traits of educational phenomena and activities must take into consideration how these phenomena and activities are predicated upon the tension between the summons to self-activity and Bildsamkeit. I address the question of attention from within the realm of educational practice and thinking. I bring to the fore the relation between the summoning (*die Aufforderung*) of an attentive and self-active subject and the potential trajectories of transformation (i.e., forms of Bildsamkeit) that are made possible through that summoning. In doing so, I frame the practice of teaching as a practice of attention formation that is situated in the co-existential domain of educational relations. The tension between these principles has been explored through notions of attention, education, and aesthetics derived mainly from the writings of Rancière. The first principle, concerning education as a summons to self-assertion and self-activity, has been explored as an event of summoning, or inviting, an attentive subject into being. The second principle, concerning the possibilities for that subject to transform and grow according to the subject’s own self-assertion, has been explored as a self-active response to the summoning.

**A Rancièrian Take on Teaching—A Conclusion**

From a critical relational perspective, where the relation is seen as constitutive of educational situations and where the possibility for uniqueness, difference, and freedom are regarded as central characteristics for a democratic conception (and ethical realization) of education, Rancière’s notions of intellectual emancipation and *partage du sensible* can be seen as political/aesthetic analogues to the summons to self-activity and Bildsamkeit, respectively. Intellectual emancipation becomes a summons to self-activity, which maintains a contingent notion of subjectivity in that it summons a relation rather than a subject.
With attention as a specific relational quality, the relation that is summoned can be understood as an attentive subject that self-actively and in relation to a specific object of study and to the specific educational situation has the possibility to claim a space as a subject but also to form/transform itself in line with its own attentive inclinations that have been summoned (called, invited) to come forth in the event of teaching. While the event of intellectual emancipation, although constituted relationally, mainly addresses the unique attentive subject, the notion of *le partage du sensible* draws attention to the larger and shared context in which the event of intellectual emancipation takes place.

An aesthetic/political framing of intellectual emancipation takes into consideration the plurality of (possible) attentive subjects that find themselves in the educational situation established by an ignorant schoolmaster. Similar to Siljander’s interpretation of *Bildsamkeit*—as a continuously evolving relation between the student, the teacher, and the subject matter—*le partage du sensible* can be seen as the event where a manifold of *curiosos* share their different relations and translations to whatever educational object is put on the table by an ignorant schoolmaster. As the notion of an “attentive subject” addresses how students are allowed to be or become unique persons through their engagement with the surrounding world, this world constantly takes new forms in the active translations being performed by a group of attentive subjects exercising their freedom as emancipated spectators.

In the curious mode of attention, any possible and potential transformational process can be seen as a response to a call or a summons from “outside.” However, this outside does not have to be materialized in the figure of the teacher or the figure of the student; it could also come from an instantaneous reconfiguration of the teacher/student/subject-matter triad as it is enacted in the event of dissensus (i.e., as it produces a unique and instantaneous *partage du sensible*). While the curious learner has no obligation toward the realm of the reasonable, the emancipatory teacher must stand on both sides of the border by pointing toward the radical exteriority of the linguistic order and toward the safe haven of the reasonable realm. That is, the
The teacher must handle the manifold of curiosos made up of a community of emancipated spectators.

**The Subject(s) Matter(s): Contributions to Didaktik**

The pragmatic/educational question that was posed in chapter two addressed the consequences for educational thinking and praxis to approach teaching and attention from a radical relational perspective. I will in this section discuss the theoretical conclusions and their consequences in relation to the teaching practice as a Didaktik phenomenon. This will be done by presenting three different “readings” of the Didaktik triangle: an atomistic reading, a relational reading, and a Rancièrian reading.

The triadic approach to teaching can be conceptualized in one of the most common models of teaching and learning, namely, the Didaktik triangle (see Figure 1). This model focuses on the three main relations that educational activities usually consist of (Hopmann, 1997): the relation between teacher and student, the relation between student and subject matter, and the relation between teacher and subject matter.

![Figure 1. The Didaktik triangle (Hopmann, 1997)](image)

From this model, certain educational “figurations” can be derived, such as the teacher/subject-matter–figuration (e.g., the subject matter personified by the teacher), the student/subject–figuration (e.g., the student), the teacher/student–figuration (e.g., the teacher as a product of the relation to her group of students), or the student/teacher–figuration (e.g., the student as emerging through the engagement or non-engagement in the educational activities initiated by the teacher).
Künzli (1998) has shown that the Didaktik triangle can be interpreted in different ways, depending on which of the three main relations (of representation, experience, or intercourse) is highlighted and on how the qualities of these relations are understood. He notes that the subject matter can be thought of in terms of discipline (in relation to teacher rationality and students’ abilities to learn), culture (in relation to teacher friendliness and student formation), or politics (in relation to teacher credibility and students’ wisdom/prudence). In short, Künzli shows how different interpretations of the Didaktik triangle can lead to different notions of teaching. In the next two paragraphs I will discuss Benner’s educational principles in relation to three different interpretations of the Didaktik triangle. I will also show how these interpretations bring about different notions of teaching.

**Toward a Relational Interpretation of the Teaching Triad**

The Didaktik triangle of teacher, student, and subject matter can function as a type of relation made up of separate units. Interpreting this triangle in a straightforward way, the principle of the summons to self-activity (Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit) would easily be associated with the function of the teacher (to teach), whereas the principle of Bildsamkeit would be associated with the function of the student (to learn). The teacher becomes the one who demands a change in behavior on the part of the student, who should then change/adapt his or her behavior accordingly. The subject matter becomes the medium through which the demand for change is channeled and upon which this change is projected.

In a lesson of algebra, for instance, the teacher presents certain rules and problems that can be solved by applying the rules in different ways. By presenting and explaining, the demand from the teacher to the student is to adapt these rules and learn how to use them correctly in an appropriate mathematical context. The mathematical transformation is materialized through the student when the rules are used in such a way that the mathematical problems are solved. By attending to the subject matter, the teacher has attracted the attention of the student and an educational outcome has become a fact. If this does not succeed, the
teacher must attend to the student in order to modify the explanations and/or make the student attend more thoroughly, by means of either control or motivation.

With this rather instrumental approach to teaching, attention becomes an inherent trait of the active functions of the triangle, namely of the student and of the teacher. Thus it is possible to talk of the attention of the student and the attention of the teacher and how they direct their individual attention. With teaching as partly a form of summons to self-activity (*Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit*), the focus will tend toward the teacher’s ability to direct the student’s attention toward the subject matter. With this perspective it becomes easy to blame any shortcomings of teaching on a lack of attention on the part of the teachers, the students, or both.

Through a relational interpretation of the Didaktik triangle, one can start from the three pairs that make up the triangle and the way interaction comes about through the relations between these pairs (relations of relations). In that way the Didaktik triangle better shows how teaching can be understood as an activity of attention formation. Here the relational traits of teaching lie at the center of the investigation of attention. The principle of the summons to self-activity (*Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit*) and the principle of *Bildsamkeit* are represented by the sides that make up the triangle. These sides represent relations that can be understood as both unidirectional and reciprocal. From a relational perspective students are defined through their relation to the teacher, on the one hand, and the subject matter, on the other hand. The teacher is defined in the same manner, through their relation to the subject matter and the student(s). The summons to self-activity (*Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit*) can be interpreted as a demand for change generated through the specifics of each of the three relations defined by the Didaktik triangle.

Going back to the lesson of algebra, it is the teacher’s mathematical activities, the very engagement with the subject matter, that produce the demand for change and not, as in the example above, the teacher’s demand for attention to the mathematical rules. But there is also a reciprocal dimension to this relational interpretation in which the relation between the student and the subject matter calls for the
teacher’s attention. It is the student’s mathematical activities (i.e., the student in the process of *embodying* mathematics) that call for a change on the part of the teacher. Teaching becomes a reciprocal activity of joint attention formation, since it is the different layers of attention to the subject matter that need to be disputed, shared, and formed.\(^{16}\) *Bildsamkeit* becomes, from this perspective, the inherent dynamic of the Didaktik triangle itself. Every educative event has the potential of reconfiguring the Didaktik triangle as a certain configuration of attention formation.

Read as above, what the Didaktik triangle shows is the complexity of relations that are all at work in the activity of teaching. If the model is interpreted from a relational perspective, it also reflects the dynamics of teaching in a way that allows for discussions concerning becoming, subjectivity, and transformation in relation to both form and content of educative events. Superimposing the Didaktik triangle on the triadic account of subjectivity, it is possible to see teaching as an activity that affects the subject as a relational being, since it invites the subject to relate, to attend, and to transform (see Figure 2).

![Figure 2. Education from a relational perspective](image)

The Didaktik triangle thus brings both an epistemological and ontological form to the phenomenon of attention formation. Thus, it functions not only as an aesthetically simple form but also as a way of framing and constructing the relational traits of teaching that maintains a stringent educational focus. With the triadic model of teaching as a

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\(^{16}\) Concerning the specific challenges of teaching mathematics with regard to, especially, communication and context, see, e.g., Ryve, Nilsson, and Mason (2012) and also Nilsson and Ryve (2010). For a discussion on the challenges of mathematics education in which inspiration is taken from a critical relational perspective, see, e.g., Ljungblad and Lennerstad (2011).
structural backdrop for the argument, teaching becomes as an aesthetic activity that brings about a landscape of and for attention formation. Attention formation thus moves along the borders of this triadic relation, sometimes inside and sometimes outside. This aesthetic interpretation of the Didaktik triangle can now be elaborated further by bringing in Rancière’s notion of education and aesthetics.

**A Rancièrean Notion of Didaktik**

With my Rancièrean reading of attention, the Didaktik triangle takes on a quite different meaning than being a mere schema of educational processes. In the following I will show how the difference between stultification (Figure 3) and emancipation (Figure 4) can be illustrated by means of the Didaktik triangle. In Figure 3, I present a one-dimensional projection of the triangle to accentuate how the teacher stands between the student and the subject matter.

![Figure 3. Stultification instead of Didaktik](image)

In the stultifying relation (Figure 3), the subject matter is presented by the teacher as a given object of knowledge for the student to learn. Both subject matter and the teacher’s knowledge of it come before the student, who will always be one step behind (in terms of intelligence). In the emancipatory relation (Figure 4), the teacher’s attention is directed toward both the attention of the student, that is, the relation between the student and the subject matter, and the will of the student.
Rancière’s discussions focus not only on the activity of attending but also on the relational aspects of that very activity. His notion of equality as a relation of (reasonable) wills makes it possible to think of teaching as an aesthetic activity that forms itself around the complex of relations that is put into play through the inherent tension between the summons to self-activity and the Bildsamkeit. The relation between teacher, student, and subject matter constitutes the activity of teaching as an activity that moves on the borders of the radical exteriority of the linguistic order, an order over which it retains control through the force of attention. The summoning of the attentive subject can therefore be regarded as the summoning of an attentive relation, the quality and character of which can depend on, for example, the intentionality of the subjects and the context in which the relation comes to life. It has been shown that, through Rancière’s discussions on the activity of attending and the relational aspects of that activity, teaching can be construed aesthetically/politically rather than epistemologically. This means that the existence of the units “student(s)”, “teacher”, and “subject matter” do not necessarily bring about the activity of teaching: The very quality of the activities and the relations that constitute the teaching event are just as important. The responsibility for the teacher is therefore not just to teach, but also to bring about teaching.
In chapter three, I presented some examples from the philosophy of education. There, attention was explored as a qualitative relation between either two subjects or a subject and an object of study. Noddings put forth *caring* as a form of attentive relation (of engrossment). Todd examined a specific form of *listening* as a pre-epistemic relation to the unknown other. Weil’s notion of attention could be described as a negative effort of detached *waiting*. Finally, I turned to Rancière, whose attentive relation had to do with a relation of reasonable wills paying attention to the radical exteriority of the linguistic order. By focusing on Rancière’s notion of attention, especially in relation to the summons to self-activity and *Bildsamkeit* principles, another quality of attention—*curiosity*—was examined. I would like to tie these qualities to the Didaktik triangle. The event of intellectual emancipation can be seen as the summons of an attentive relation, where the teacher as an ignorant schoolmaster focuses on the students’ relation with a certain subject matter. With a notion of attention that stresses its relational qualities, it can be helpful to revisit the Didaktik triangle in order to clarify some educational consequences of the discussions put forth in this chapter.

![Figure 5. Educational qualities of attention](image)

The different qualities presented in Figure 5 help one understand the triadic relation between student, teacher, and subject matter as
constituting something more than just a process of knowledge transfer; in addition, the figure is more than just a schematic picture of the relation between teaching and learning. The relations represented in Figure 5 can be seen as different amalgams of attention and will, and they suggest that the triangle describes teaching as a dynamic relationship with different affective, epistemological, and ethical layers. The discussions of teaching as a summons of an attentive subject point to a reading of the Didaktik triangle with a focus on how an ignorant schoolmaster directs interest toward the relation between the student and the subject matter. In my aesthetic interpretation of the Didaktik triangle, the focus is on the relations between relations. The specific relations are teacher–subject-matter, teacher–student, and student–subject-matter, which can all be characterized by the attentive qualities, such as caring, waiting, listening, or curiosity. Putting these relations into play is a way toward an understanding of the praxis of teaching as both a form of setting up a reasonable realm, mainly through the caring relation of teacher–subject-matter and a form of letting this realm be put into question through the curious relation of student–subject-matter.

**Didaktik, Rancière, and Beyond**

The central educational contribution from Rancière is based on the assumption of the possibility for emancipation to emanate out of an equal, will-to-will relation rather than an unequal relation between intelligences. What Rancière brings to the fore and what has also been addressed by educational thinkers such as Biesta (2011, 2014), Säfström (2005, 2011a, 2011b), and Todd (2003, 2009) is the importance of acknowledging, rather than turning away from, the will-to-will relation, since it is through this relation that emancipation is possible. As an emancipatory relation, it must take place in the domain of subjectification, where it takes the form of a dissensus and thus creates a *partage du sensible* that impacts all of the educational domains. There is a risk, however, that the unique person who comes forth and speaks with his or her own voice might be understood as a neutral unique person rather than as a sexed and embodied unique person (see Ryther, 2014). In this section I set out to problematize the
notion of a *partage du sensible* as an aesthetic/political event possible for every subject to bring about. More specifically, I provide a feminist critique against and a continuation of the aesthetic/political notion of education, mainly by drawing on Todd (2009), Ryther (2014), and Irigaray (1993). This could be seen as a way of enacting a Rancièrian politics in relation to Rancière’s own writing in order to explore the fissures in the sensible realm emerging from that writing.

Kant (1781/2000) thought that the way the world is understood depends on how our minds shape our perception of space and time. A change of this perception would change our understanding in general. With Rancière, this change is not a question of the relation between the mind and the world but a relation between *le partage du sensible* and the political possibilities for subjectification. However, in line with Irigaray (1993), it seems that this is not enough because thought also is influenced by (a) how the body is shaped and (b) how the morphology of the body (i.e., our *bodily imaginary*) interacts with the morphology of the surrounding world. The notion of sexual difference here does not have to do with anatomy but with a morphological influence on our unconscious: Irigaray claims, from a psychoanalytic perspective, that our unconscious affects our general understanding of ourselves and our world. Irigaray thus transforms a supposed neutral framework for human thinking into a morphological framework for human thinking in which world, body, and thought are inseparable. By stressing the ethical implications of this way of thinking, Irigaray shows that the way our bodies are shaped unconsciously influences our way of perceiving and understanding the world. She also shows that there is lack of discourse stemming from a female morphology, mostly since it has been (both unconsciously and consciously) ruled out by the discourse of male morphology. Irigaray shows that an ethics of sexual difference can only be written from a neutral language, a language that, to her, is yet to come. With Irigaray and Todd and their respective readings of Levinas, it is possible to derive the ethicality of educational relations from the notion of a sensible passivity. With the ethics of Levinas, the responsibility for the other comes prior to ontology, i.e., being, which means that one cannot choose what is good because what is better (as in more ethical) is given before both existence and essence. The ethical
Teaching As Attention Formation

attunement has already been done, so to speak. Irigaray’s (1993) contribution to these ethical considerations is that if education—as a conscious striving for the good or betterment of the society, the world, or humankind—does not acknowledge a two-sided ontology, it becomes pushed through a discourse steeped in a one-sided (i.e., male) morphological understanding. Going through this discourse of male subjectivity toward a specific ethos will only produce a small fraction of a “true” ethos, whereas the rest, at best, remains as tacit understanding or unarticulated experiences. These experiences are what Irigaray refers to as sensible transcendentals (see Todd, 2003; Irigaray, 1993). Todd writes:

The intersubjective relation, Irigaray claims, is therefore not an abstract conjecture, but one marked by corporeal experience. Transcendence makes its appearance, then, through this realm of the sensible, where alterity allows for “sensibility and thought to come together.” That is, the question of coexistence needs to reflect this “sensible transcendental,” this relation to the other as other, the one we touch, smell, caress, and hear. (Todd, 2009, p. 127)

A way out of the discourse of male morphology into a more just discourse, a discourse of a two-sided ontology, would be to adapt, as Irigaray does, a more placental attitude to the world, an attitude that acknowledges both the male and the female morphology.

To further deal with the problems related to this educational intentionality as a potentially hostile overtaking of the other, one could look at Levinas’s metaphor of the caress as an anticipation of a pure future without content (Levinas, 1985, p. 62). This metaphor brings an imagery that opens up for the unpredictability inherent in (though often seen as problematic, rather than as a creative force that nourishes) the educational relation. With Levinas, time becomes a “relationship to unattainable alterity and, thus, interruption of rhythm and its returns” (Levinas, 1985, p. 61). This is also a way of perceiving time as intentionality (of the other), since the proximity/alterity disturbs any repetitive and foreseeable rhythm even as it creates a new rhythm. This disrupted rhythm, or syncope, only gets its meaning in relation to the pulse. Ethics, from this perspective, would be to attend to the rhythm
produced because of the existence of another person. Irigaray has commented on Levinas’ thoughts on the caress:

This gesture, which is always and still preliminary to and in all nuptials, which weds without consum(mat)ing, which perfects while abiding by the outlines of the other, this gesture may be called: the touch of the caress. (Irigaray, 1993, p. 186)

The caress symbolizes the ambiguous character of nearness and distance. The distance to the other can carry the relation as distance: it is the distance that makes the other into either same or nothing. The caress is felt as the friction between two surfaces, so the caress can only exist as a twofold relation, a topological phenomenon, where the limit surface of the planes cuts through space, making its own subdivision where education might exist, ethically as well as aesthetically. The touch is an intersection of two unique movements. The pedagogical relation is the coexistence of these movements and the double movements of their reception. In the metaphor of the caress one might find a pedagogy of difference. This caress is nothing less than the two-sided surface of attention formation.

Todd (2009) understands Irigaray’s project as a way of enacting a Rancièrian politics, not by claiming a neutral equality but an equality based on sexed difference. In that way, Irigaray uses Rancière in a way that makes it possible to understand the limits of Rancière’s politics. From a Rancièrian perspective it has been shown that the principle of Bildsamkeit can be interpreted as a situation- and place-specific emergence of possible educational transformations summoned by the place itself, as it comes together through the manifold of emancipated spectators. Those things which in regular terms would be referred to as teacher, student, and subject matter now constitute a contextual whole that I have been referring to as the practice of teaching. In terms of attention formation, one could say that teaching, as an enactment of a pedagogy of place (see also Løvlie, 2007c), summons attentive subjects that together co-create, for example, an object to study, an idea to contemplate, or a practice to experience. However, with the notion of the morphology of sexual difference, some things remain undeveloped. Questions about uniqueness and otherness need to be further
problematized by acknowledging the possible existence of a surplus of symbolic orders generated through different bodily imaginaries. Irigaray, according to Hagström (2016), shows how the symbolic order we inhabit is distorted and therefore has to be reimagined. Bringing questions of embodiment and materiality into Rancière’s writing therefore enables a more corporal interpretation of le partage du sensible.

What these quite different discussions point to, is that intentionality and its educational imperative Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit can also be thought of as a place- and situation-specific relational phenomenon. Instead of as a command from a knowledgeable subject to a less knowledgeable subject to change, adapt, learn, or transform, it could be thought of as the touch between two (or more) life-world patterns, caressing and touching, co-creating a potential trajectory in their future of structural coupling (c.f. Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991). In Rancièrian terms, one could talk about a partitioning of the sensible, but now in a context where potential transformations of subjectivity are never neutral, but sexed and embodied. The principle of Bildsamkeit could be interpreted as a situation- and place-specific emergence of possible educational transformations summoned by the place itself, as it comes together as an aesthetic unfolding of attentive subjects and attentive relations.

In terms of attention, teaching summons both attentive subjects at the same time as it constitutes an attentional field that sets the sensible and reasonable limits to the self-activities provoked by the summons. This morphological aesthetics of Bildsamkeit helps one understand its unavoidable and challenging relationship with the principle of Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit.

**Attention Formation as a Morphology of Didaktik**

From the outset of the argument and in its further development, I have been using the teaching triad as an illustration of the interdependencies that characterize the practice of teaching and as a way of reminding the reader that even the smallest (conceptual) unit of the teaching practice must be thought of as a relation. However, from the discussions in this
chapter it becomes evident that maybe even this triadic unit might be too simplistic a way of depicting the practice of teaching as a practice of attention formation. In adding the contextual and material aspects of the teaching practice, it becomes evident that the teaching triad is always a reduction of something more complex, something that is impossible to illustrate with a schematic picture or diagram. What the triad at its best can illustrate is a projection of a multidimensional phenomenon onto a two-dimensional surface, where the words “teacher,” “student” and “subject matter” easily lead one to think of them as signifiers of closed units with specific functions. One way of keeping this triad relevant within the context of the thesis and in relation to the notion of teaching as a lived event of attention formation would be to think of those units in terms of specific activities, rather than in terms of functions connected to a predetermined subject position. Adding just one extra dimension makes it possible to draw a three-sided pyramid, where three surrounding sides could represent a specific activity. These activities could be thought of as “teachering,” “studenting” and “mattering.”

![Figure 6. “This is not teaching!”](image)

Now, when thinking of the teaching practice as a complex of certain emerging activities that are all dependent on the educational situation as it takes form in a context or through the material co-enactments of the educational situation itself, these activities can be seen as abstractions of possible ways of forming attention. The activity of
“teaching” can be seen as just one way of summoning attention as can the activities of “studenting” and “mattering.” This enables one to understand the teaching practice as a practice of attention formation without reducing it into the activities of directing or paying attention.
9. Toward an Aesthetics of Teaching

The purpose of the study is to explore teaching as a practice of attention formation by putting forth the relation as constitutive of both attention and teaching. The theoretical basis for the exploration is the notion of teaching as a triadic relation situated in the co-existential domain of education, characterized by the principles summons to self-activity and Bildsamkeit. Through a Rancièreian perspective, this triadic relation has been explored as a relation of attention formation.

The Argument Revisited

I approach the question of attention in terms other than those dealing with behavior, cognition, order, control, and effective performance within the frames of the classroom. Instead, I approach attention as a qualitative relation that shapes and is shaped by political and aesthetic forms of subjectivity that may or may not come to life within different educational or social contexts. The concept of attention is vast, and even when it is framed as a cognitive or psychological process, attention is not an easy phenomenon to conceptualize (Parasuraman, 2001; Arvidson, 2006). This has to do with the complexity of attentional processes (Parasuraman, 2001), on the one hand, and with tacit
normative claims or metaphysical assumptions made with regard to the meaning and significance of attentional activities (Mole, 2011), on the other hand. I have explored some educationally significant forms of attention, starting from a notion of teaching as a relational and situation-specific affair that, in itself, forms attention. As such, the question of attention is closely linked to questions of both subjectivity and the formation of subjectivity, in line with Crary’s (1999/2001), Hagner’s (2003), and Sobe’s (2004) discussions on the pivotal role of attention in the shaping and formation of subjectivity, at work at least since the late 19th century (Crary, 1999/2001).

From an educational perspective, attention could be thought of as partly an educational phenomenon describing a certain quality in an educational relation or an educational situation. Mole’s (2011) idea of attention as an adverbial phenomenon opens up for studying attention as a quality of a relation, which implies that one should have an idea of what kind of relation and what kind of quality one is interested in studying. One ends up with different results depending on whether one studies a specific kind of attention that is needed in the activity of schoolwork or one studies different qualities of attention that could be developed through or are even integral to the activity of schoolwork. Furthermore, Crary’s (1999/2001) and Hagner’s (2003) discussions turn attention into a relational phenomenon that is formed in a societal and interpersonal context; this makes attention also connected to notions of subjectivity and selfhood. These discussions resonate with several discussions within the field of education, especially within the philosophy of education where attention is understood as a relational phenomenon emerging from and/or developed in an educational relation or situation (see, e.g., Noddings, 2010; Todd, 2003; Stiegler, 2010; Richards, 2011; Masschelein & Simons, 2013).

The purpose of the study is motivated through a problematizing of psychologically, behaviorally, and cognitively based (or biased) perspectives that frame attention as either an individual capacity of the student or an expected student behavior in the classroom. By offering an educational alternative to those pitfalls—where attention is seen as a cognitive process or as a behavior that can function more or less well in the performance of so-called “schoolwork” or as an instrumental
device through which the goals of curriculum can be reached (no matter what the cost in terms of integrity, difference, and freedom of the students)—my intentions are to place the question of attention within the confines of educational praxis and thinking. If attention is seen only as a precondition for successful schoolwork, teachers who are responsible for the education of the young generation are cut off from having any (formal) influence in the formation of attention, as attention is seen as something students either have or do not have. Attention becomes negatively defined through the emergence of its opposite, inattention, especially in relation to the activity of “schoolwork” (see Ljungdalh, 2016). From this negative logic, inattention just means that the attending does not meet the specific intentions or behavioral expectations of the educator (or the educational administrators, policy-makers, etc.). Seeing inattentiveness not as the inability to pay attention but, rather, as attending to the “wrong” things would reduce the work of a teacher (who intends to reach as many students as possible) to a constant struggle of trying to capture attention and direct it toward the content of what should be “taught” or “learned.”

Together with Stiegler (2010) and his elaboration on Hayles’s notion of deep and hyper attention, it seems that, even if schools took some responsibility for the formation of students’ attention, it would be very much at the expense of deep attention, with a focus on skills apt for various multitasking skills needed in a complex and ever-changing information society. Furthermore, if deep attention has any sanctioned place in the dominant discourses shaped by neo-liberalism, economism, and measurability, it will most likely work as a mere therapeutic device to be implemented as a tool for the purpose of managing stress-related side-effects of an overburdened curriculum (see O’Donnell, 2015; Ergas, 2015).

Through the notion of teaching as attention formation I suggest that an educational event or situation could be thought of as a summons that invites subjects into awareness of themselves and of the world. The activity of paying attention is a relational mode of being in the world rather than an inherent capacity of the subject. In the practice of teaching, one could speak of a certain attention that can be enacted, promoted, and summoned. Different qualitative dimensions of this
attention—like caring (Noddings, 1984, 2010; Stiegler, 2010), listening (Todd, 2003), waiting (Weil, 1951/2012; Tubbs, 2005; Rogers, 2011), and curiosity (Lewis, 2012)—help bring forth the practice of teaching, or rather specific teaching events or activities, as practices that bring about and form attention. Teaching constitutes both a limited realm of reason and a safe space in order for that realm to be questioned by attentive investigations that move on and push the borders of that realm.

Drawing on the educational, political, and aesthetic perspectives of Rancière, especially when combining them with his own discussions of intellectual emancipation and *le partage du sensible*, the teaching practice as an aesthetic practice comes about as a specific sphere of lived-through attention formation, where attention is a shared phenomenon of being called into presence and becoming a unique person among other unique persons.

In the following paragraphs I connect the theoretical contributions to the larger context of educational thinking and practice. I also discuss some methodological issues regarding the question of writing theoretically about education. The educational significance of the thesis is discussed in this chapter through an elaboration on the meaning of “an aesthetics of attention formation” and a reflection upon a notion of “practicing educational thinking.”

**The Aesth-et(h)ics of Attention Formation**

In part I, I presented the study as being partly a work of educational philosophy and partly a work of educational theory. The common denominator is the focus on educational relations, and especially the radical relational approach to the practice of teaching. By focusing on the practice of teaching as an event of attention formation, my educational readings and interpretations of Rancière provide an aesthetic interpretation of educational relations and activities, especially with regard to the practice of teaching. Through these readings and interpretations I aim to contribute to critical discussions that focus on ethical and political aspects of education—aspects that are hard to address without understanding educational processes as predicated upon possibilities for freedom, otherness, and uniqueness to
be maintained and/or brought about in relation to the integrity of students, both as individuals and as a community.

The ethics and politics of educational relations cannot be a system of rules or principles. Herbart (1908) stressed the unique character of educational relations and their resistance to any formal rules or methods, and he did this by turning to an aesthetic form of ethics that was always specific to each unique educational situation and relation. Since every educational encounter has a unique element, it cannot be directed from an outside and abstract principle. It would be impossible to have an educational relation and then make it into an ethical relation by seeing to it that its educational purposes are fulfilled at the same time as some scheme of ethical principles is fulfilled.

Instead of talking about ethics only or aesthetics only, it might be fruitful to talk of an *aesth-ethics* of education, an educational aesthetics that could deal with the co-creation of simultaneously existing worlds and world-views without having to fall into either nihilism (everything is meaningless) or delusion (everything is possible). This ethical/political aesthetics allows for the attentive subjects to be nothing less than corporeal beings who address and are being addressed by the surrounding world (of otherness and difference, of persons, of things, and of ideas), with and through their senses, in their multi-sensible (synesthetic) experiences of otherness and difference that emerge from the summoning enacted in and through the practice of teaching. Lewis (2012, p. 19) writes: “In short, the aesthetics of democratic education represent the true suspension of the law of…assimilation pedagogy in the name of a fundamental breach between sense and sense.”

Understanding attention as a contingent relation, possible to develop in educational contexts, also enables an understanding of the interdependency between the attending subjects and the objects of their attention. They are interwoven in a relational complex that in itself could be regarded as a field of attention formation. As such, it is also a field that makes room for and creates emancipatory activities the outcome of which can never be fully predicted.

What then, does an *aesth-ethics* of attention formation mean? In the context of the thesis, *aesth-ethics* is thought of in a double sense.
First, it offers a particular way of thinking about the relation between attention and education. In this relation attention is not a capacity or characteristic of a subject but rather a disposition of human subjectivity. This subjectivity is interdependent with the different relations between a subject and the surrounding world and with the materiality of this very world, summoning the attentive subject into self-activity. Depicting teaching as a summons that invites a subject to engage in a self-active transformative process turns it into a practice of attention formation. Second, by seeing teaching as a practice, teaching in itself becomes an aesthetic activity in that it has to do with the co-creation of a sensible realm, where attentive subjects are summoned to take part in and to engage with the world. The world then becomes something that is enacted between human beings and their respective engagement with it, rather than being something given and taken for granted before the event of attention formation. This does not mean that the “world” and the persons engaging in and with this “world” are to be regarded as unreal, but they remain most certainly contingent in a sense that they create their specific meaning(s) of themselves and the world in relation to each other. This contingency of the world and/or the social fabric makes teaching an aesthetic endeavor in that it is about the sharing of a common world that emerges from the act of summoning attentive subjects to partake in that very sharing.

Although educational relations, especially in their institutional forms, are more or less asymmetric, it is important to understand the summons as a principle that allows and builds upon otherness and difference, keeping the educative asymmetry ethical at its core. Teaching is an activity through which the summons for attention takes the form of something like a vibrating realm that both invites and challenges, creates and destroys, says yes and no. As much as teaching is about handing over a “world,” it is also about receiving a “world” and handling that “world.” In that respect, teaching as attention formation is a shared event in a shared world. The first educational gesture of attention formation would be the one that summons the subject into presence, in a sense that the subject attends to the world. When this happens, the subject is given the opportunity both to become in and to
make herself a world. Teaching would thus be about a common “worlding” and not just about coming into the world.

**Writing as an Embodiment of Educational Thinking**

In chapter two I addressed the double nature of education as both a field of praxis and a science of that field of praxis. By drawing on Säfström’s notion of pragmatism (Säfström, 2005) as a way of doing theory in praxis and Biesta’s and Säfström’s idea of educational thinking as a way of both participating in and questioning educational practices (Biesta & Säfström, 2011), I have addressed the question of attention as an educational one, understanding the event of teaching as an event of attention formation and by continuing a tradition of educational thinking in which attention is a central element (either explicitly, as in Pestalozzi’s, Herbart’s, and Montessori’s educational discussions, or implicitly, through the principles of Bildsamkeit and summons to self-activity). By introducing Rancière and reading him as an educational thinker, I have put forth his discussions on aesthetics, politics, and education as educationally relevant and as discussions with an inherent educational ethos. By embodying the ideas that they express, Rancière’s discussions move beyond the representative claims of the written text. As such, they work as presentations or suggestions for thought that invite the (attentive) reader to translate, to rethink, and to rewrite the content in his or her own unique style. Rancière’s notion of writing has been depicted as follows:

> Writing is not simply a sequence of typographic signs whose printed form is distinct from oral communication. It is a specific distribution of the sensible that replaces the representative regime’s ideal of living speech with a paradoxical form of expression that undermines the legitimate order of discourse. In one respect, writing is the silent speech of democratic literarity whose ‘orphan letter’ freely circulates and speaks to anyone and everyone because it has no living logos to direct it. At the same time, however, writing lends itself to the attempt to establish an ‘embodied discourse’ as the incarnation of the truth of the community. Writing is consequently caught in a continual conflict between democratic literarity and the desire to establish a true writing of the word made flesh. (Rockhill, 2004, pp. 97–98)

By reading and rewriting the thoughts expressed by Rancière, one must go through a double aesthetic experience. First, by reading Rancière,
one is presented with a *partage du sensible* that enables a way of rethinking, readdressing, and reworking (more or less) common and taken-for-granted assumptions about educational relations. Second, in the process of writing, where the writing is a form of reaction or response to Rancière’s ideas, one contributes to the creation of a new *partage du sensible*, that is, new possible ways of doing, speaking, thinking, and seeing. However, and as the quote above warns, there is always a risk with the written word that it establish (or create an illusion of establishing) a truth that shuts down any possible alternative forms of thinking and acting. Furthermore, as a contribution to scientific discourse, a doctoral thesis is almost by default bound to claims of truth.

I have, rather than making any claims of truth, tried to be truthful in my writing. This truthfulness has taken the form of giving good reasons for the presented argument by grounding it in educational thought and educational principles and by relating it to real life challenges and dilemmas for educational practices and the educational activities taking place therein. It has also taken the form of being explicit in terms of presenting in full length the origin, the development, and the finalization of the argument as it has been shaped in and through the writing process. Thompson (2011) has described the writing process in the following way:

> At the heart of a text taking shape lies a history of thinking, which, in order to become a text, becomes invisible. To be more specific, one cannot really speak of a finished text in terms of a “result.” There is nothing to read where reading does not occur, and thus qua *différance* will always be read differently: where the text gets under way and changes in the Other’s thinking. (Thompson, 2011, p. 453)

In that respect, the text in its whole is an enactment of my research and not just a recollection or a presentation of my research. Furthermore, by being the research in itself, the text presents itself as research in a sense that it invites readers of the text to either agree or disagree, to act or react, and, hopefully, to formulate their own thoughts and actions that can inform educational thinking and practice, both in the present and in the future.
Attention, Teaching, and the Art of Breathing

My hopes and aspirations with this thesis have been to find a relevant connection between attention and education in order to readdress the question of attention as an important issue for educational thinking and practice. By highlighting the complexities of the practice of teaching, I have explored different ways of dealing with attention as a multidimensional phenomenon within this very practice. Although I have directed the focus toward the practical (that is, the lived-through) aspects of the teaching experience, this has been done first and foremost through the attempt to think the relation between teaching and attention. That is, I have theoretically explored teaching by practicing educational thinking. But the theoretical sides of teaching are just as important as the practical ones, and the two should not be separated from each other. An analogy can be made from the activity of breathing. When you breathe, your body performs two specific and related tasks. It breathes in and it breathes out. This happens whether you are aware of it or not. A number of mindfulness techniques usually start by directing one’s attention toward breathing, as it is assumed that the way we breathe influences our momentary (and future) well-being. Teaching can also be described as a form of breathing, which can be performed more or less attentively. From a dualistic perspective, the teaching practice can be regarded as the exhaling part of a specific activity, while the thinking of this practice can be regarded as the inhaling part of that very same activity. What I have tried to do is explore teaching as a whole, as both inhaling and exhaling, thinking and acting—activities that cannot be separated. Hagström (2015) argues that the breath and the breathing work as a bridge between mind and spirit. Applied to attention, the analogy of breathing suggests that the outward-directed and the inward-directed attention cannot be separated; the attentive subject emerges as a whole being responding to another whole being as they both come together in the event of attention formation.
Concluding Remarks

It is hard to pinpoint or to define the practice of teaching from a set of methodological standards, especially when that practice is seen as a relational complex emerging from a community of unique spectators organized around a specific segment of, if not “the world”, at least “a world,” which seems to become harder and harder to construe from a common denominator, since said world will always be looked upon from different world-views that are more or less incommensurable.

How is it possible to define students as attentive or inattentive in this plethora of differences? With Rancière’s notions of intellectual emancipation and intellectual spectatorship, it is possible to think of attention as an educational potential, rather than an educational precondition or an educational end. In other words, education both starts and ends with attention. It is through the event of attention formation, set up by the community of spectators, carefully orchestrated by an ignorant schoolmaster (the guardian of the reasonable/sensible), that the plurality of life-worlds makes up a new (and temporary) world that has a chance of being shaped and reshaped by an educational sensibility for difference and curiosity.
10. Epilogue

What kind of world have we been born into, what kind of world are we creating, and what kind of world do we want to leave for our children and the coming generations? These three questions and how they relate to each other, I believe, are the fundamental issues that any educationist should either address or have some idea of before proceeding to develop theoretical perspectives or practical methodologies or to conduct other sorts of educational inquiries. It is also in relation to these questions that the question of attention works as a pivotal one for educational thinking and acting. It becomes pivotal in the sense that the world—shared in and through educational practices—can only be received if someone is attending to it. However, with the relational and adverbial approaches to attention that I have put forth, the subject and the world emerge together in the very activity of paying (or giving) attention to each other. On the one hand, attention cannot only be an individual characteristic, since (a) attention precedes individuality and identity and (b) individuality and identity are socially constructed phenomena that, as structuralism and post-structuralism have taught us, can only be negatively defined, that is, defined in relation to what the individual or the identity is not (i.e., attentive student or inattentive student). On the
other hand, attention cannot only be a social construct that precedes the individual and shapes it through the dense materiality of the discursive formations that happen to be dominant at the time (the notion of “schoolwork” as the standard for deciding who is or who is not being attentive, or the practice of reading as a good example of deep attention).

I have put forth a notion of attention as a relational phenomenon in which the unique and irreplaceable subject comes into being by responding to the summons of the surrounding world and by striving against the materiality of that very same world, a world shaped by the plurality of subjects paying attention to and responding to their different worlds and world-views. This is not an all-inclusive notion of attention, but rather an educational notion of attention. With this educational notion, the activity of paying attention is integral to education as an event of being called into presence in a world of plurality, difference, and possible freedom. The most common staging for this event is the classroom. It is there, in the classroom, that our children are left to spend their days, by sharing and by not sharing their lives, where they come together with their different hopes and aspirations and where their teachers work for the sake of their present and future well-being in the lived and shared practice of teaching. There, attention formation might be the educational event when someone, as a unique other, is called into presence and is given room to claim and to speak for his or her interest. It is an event made possible by those teachers who have the sensibility to discover its coming, the courage to let it happen, and the strength to accept the consequences of it.
11. Svensk sammanfattning


Uppmärksamhet är ett fenomen som de senaste 150 åren främst har beskrivits i psykologiska, kognitiva eller neurobiologiska termer. Dock har uppmärksamhet varit en pedagogisk fråga och en fråga för undervisning i minst 3000 år (genom t ex Platon, Rousseau, Herbart, Montessori, James, Dewey). I avhandlingen tar jag fasta på den pedagogiska traditionen av att tänka uppmärksamhet i relationella termer och något som skapas i en undervisningssituation, när lärare och elever möts i relation till ett ämnesinnehåll. Den pedagogiska dimensionen av detta möte förstår jag med hjälp av principerna *uppfordran till självverksamhet* och *bildsamhet*. Dessa principer utvecklar jag med hjälp av Rancière:s diskussioner om undervisning som *intellektuell emancipation* och om estetik/politik som ett *delande av det sinnliga*.
Del I - Approaching Attention Educationally

Syftet med denna introducerande del är att kontextualisera, grunda och, därigenom, motivera avhandlingens huvudsakliga problematik. Kapitel ett inleds med några nedslag i den pedagogiska traditionen genom vilka jag visar hur uppmärksamhet finns med som en återkommande problematik för pedagogiska tänkare (e.g., Platon, Comenius, Rousseau, Herbart, Montessori, James, Dewey). Utifrån denna idéhistoriska koppling placerar jag avhandlingens problematik i den pedagogisk-filosofiska kontext som intresserar sig för relationens betydelse för pedagogiken som praktik och fenomen. Specifikt ansluter jag mig till ett radikalt relationellt perspektiv, ur vilket en pedagogisk relation förstås i termer av skillnad och pluralitet samt ses som något som föregår och möjliggör för subjekt att bli till och träda fram. Baserat på ovanstående resonemang utvecklar jag syftet med avhandlingen som är att utreda undervisning som en uppmärksamhetsbildande praktik.


Del II – Developing the Educational Dimensions of Attention


Del III - Teaching and Attention with Rancière

I del tre utvecklas idén om undervisning som uppmärksamhetsbildande med hjälp av Rancières diskussioner om relationen mellan undervisning och intellektuell emancipation samt diskussioner om estetik och politik som ett delande av det sinnliga.

I kapitel fem, An Aesthetic Approach to Teaching, utvecklar jag en föreställning om undervisning som en estetisk och politisk praktik som med uppmärksamheten som centralt element möjliggör det (unika) subjektets tillblivelse i en värld av skillnad. Rancière’s diskussioner om utbildning, estetik och politik bidrar till pedagogisk teori då de kan utveckla ett radikalt relationellt perspektiv på undervisning, uppmärksamhet och deras inbördes relation.

I kapitel sex, Summoning the Attentive Subject, utforskar jag undervisning som dels ett uppfordrande av uppmärksamhet dels ett uppfordrande av en uppmärksamhetsrelation. Jag utgår från Fichte’s diskussioner om den pedagogiska relationen som eine Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit, d v s uppfordran till självverksamhet. Dessa diskussioner utvecklas genom Rancières diskussioner om möjligheten för undervisning att möjliggöra intellektuell frigörelse. Med detta komplement till principen om uppfordran till självverksamhet kan undervisning förstås som ett uppfordrande av en (uppmärksamhets-)relation snarare än uppfordrandet av ett autonomt subjekt.

Del IV - Teaching as Attention Formation

Den konkluderande delen är indelad i två kapitel. I kapitel åtta sammanfattar jag resultaten från del tre samt kopplar dessa till diskussionerna i del två. I kapitel nio bidrar jag med en reflektion och diskussion i relation till avhandlingen som helhet samt till hur den i sig kan ses som ett uttryck för pedagogiskt tänkande (och dess representativa form, skrivande).

12. References


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References


204
References


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