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Narrative Identity
Ricoeur and Early Childhood Education

SANDY FARQUHAR

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The University of Auckland, 2008.
Abstract

The thesis argues that who we are, what we aspire to, and how we enact social and cultural practices are a result of the way we narrate stories about ourselves as both individuals and members of communities. The question ‘Who am I?’ is frequently answered with reference to what is important to us: our commitments and what we determine as good, valuable and right. Our identity is thus inextricably woven into our understanding of life as an unfolding story, bound by an ethical commitment to what we value. In this way, understandings of narrative and identity become part of the social and cultural context of education, drawing upon complex relationships between individual and community. It is through narrative that we construct truth about ourselves in relation to others.

The central concern of the thesis is the interplay between the ‘capable’ child subject and various readings of texts that form the educational landscape in Aotearoa New Zealand: in curriculum documents with their emphasis on relationships, reciprocity, community, culture and language; and in policy documents with their emphasis on economic rationality. The thesis examines some important narratives that emerge from readings of these curriculum and policy documents, and the impact of those narratives on identity formation in early childhood education. Examined in turn are a liberal narrative, an economic narrative and a social narrative. Each of these narratives emphasises particular discourses and rationalities within education. The thesis finds these narratives inadequate to explain understandings of the self of early childhood education.

The thesis argues that Ricoeur’s hermeneutical approach enables a range of narrative possibilities for early childhood education. The use of Ricoeur’s narrative theory in the thesis is twofold: a methodological approach for the study, and a critical exploration of the formation of ‘narrative identity’ (for both the individual and the group) through an examination of selected narratives. The thesis responds to the tensions of these narratives through Ricoeur’s understandings of ‘intersubjectivity’ and ‘just institutions’ and provides educators with an ethical framework by promoting Ricoeur’s understandings of the ‘good life’ and a ‘capable subject’.
Acknowledgements

The thesis would not have been possible without the support of my family, in particular my partner, Peter and my daughter, Zavara. I appreciate their patience and understanding throughout. Thanks also to members of my wider family and to friends and colleagues who supported me in numerous ways.

I have been fortunate to have the superb supervision of two outstanding philosophers of education, Peter Roberts and Robin Small. I have enjoyed their careful critique, wise counsel and invaluable support.

I have appreciated the support of The Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia through the Doctoral Scholarship award, and the opportunity to present many of the ideas developed in this thesis at their annual conferences. I would also like to acknowledge the Faculty of Education at the University of Auckland for the Tertiary Education Grant and for the study leave that enabled me to complete this thesis. Both organisations have provided me with a stimulating and supportive academic ‘home’.
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Abbreviations

To facilitate reference to Ricoeur’s writings, the following abbreviations are used in the thesis when referring to his published books and anthologies. The dates included below refer to the versions of the books used in the writing of the thesis and listed in the bibliography. Citations of Ricoeur’s other writings, such as papers and chapters in general collections, follow conventional author-date style.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FM</td>
<td>Fallible man</td>
<td>1965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FT</td>
<td>From text to action. Essays in hermeneutics, II</td>
<td>1991c</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Hermeneutics and the human sciences: Essays on language, action and interpretation</td>
<td>1981</td>
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<tr>
<td>INT</td>
<td>Interpretation theory: discourse and the surplus of meaning</td>
<td>1976</td>
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<tr>
<td>MHF</td>
<td>Memory, history and forgetting</td>
<td>2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>OA</td>
<td>Oneself as another</td>
<td>1992</td>
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<tr>
<td>PA 1</td>
<td>Explanation and understanding: On some remarkable connections among</td>
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<td></td>
<td>the theory of the text, theory of action, and theory of history.</td>
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<td>In The philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An anthology of his work</td>
<td>1978a</td>
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<td>PS</td>
<td>Political and social essays</td>
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<td>RI</td>
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<td>RM</td>
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<td>SE</td>
<td>The symbolism of evil</td>
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