



Between History  
and the Theory  
of Education

Methodology,  
Traditions,  
Quest



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# Between History and the Theory of Education

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Edited by

Agnieszka Stopińska-Pająk

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## Introduction

The book that we hereby present to the reader comprises papers written by the employees of the Department of Foundations of Education and History of Education, University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland. The texts address the current issues of the importance of drawing from the historical heritage in pedagogical discourse. The contemporary, widespread tendency to omit or disregard the history of the discipline is a disconcerting phenomenon threatening to leave us with a narrow perspective of mere applicability and practicality, within which pedagogy is perceived chiefly as a social science.

Pedagogy doubtless is a social science. Having defined it as such one might even consider drawing from its past heritage as hardly useful, bearing in mind that various educational institutions and pedagogical theories have been strongly rooted in the time-and-place circumstances of their creation. Despite that, also within this optics a knowledge of the past might prove inspirational as to the reflection on the advantages and disadvantages of the existing educational systems.

And yet pedagogy still undoubtedly is also one of the liberal arts. From this humanistic perspective in turn it is almost mandatory to relate to the past as it is only from a distance that one can undertake a risk-free analysis of human educational experiences or values cherished both in education and in the everyday life of past epochs. This very distance enables one the insight into the current issues at stake in pedagogy and education, and helps one address them and seek answers. The works of late pedagogues and philosophers often turn out to be more applicable when employed from a historical distance than they were in the days they were first created.

Last but not least, pedagogy has also become an interdisciplinary science which, without losing its specificity, transgresses its past generic limitations to undertake the analyses of educational phenomena across traditionally separate academic scientific disciplines. Despite the existence of a plethora



of pedagogical discourses, often mutually exclusive and irreducibly conflicted, the one crucial thing for all of them often remains unduly silenced or pushed out of sight by many pedagogical thinkers, namely that all have been founded on certain conceptualizations of human beings. In this peculiar tower of Babel, as Stefan Kunowski (1997) once aptly described the 20th century pedagogy, it is often being forgotten that each and every theory of education is built around a specific concept of humans, along with its corresponding ethics that determines behavioral standards. Participation in the discourse on what a person, as a human, should be like therefore demands that a theory of education be reflective of the achievements of a variety of sciences, particularly the humanities, including the history of education. One can positively declare that without this perspective such a discourse is not possible. It is by reflecting from this peculiar space between past and present that, to paraphrase Helmut Kajzar's (2007, p. 76) words on theatre, one manages to achieve the seemingly unachievable — to reclaim the past, present, and future by effacing the temporal boundaries that surround a given topic. The knowledge of the human being, and thus the one on the meanders of education, is being produced in effect of human relationships. These relationships can be enriched by taking up a dialogue with the past pedagogues, but also with the representatives of other sciences or even writers and artists, among others. A researcher — a pedagogue, a historian of education — obtains "a product of a doubly mediated way of experiencing the world: through the culture of original sources and the culture of the historical milieu [one could add, also through the culture of the pedagogical milieu, A. Stopińska-Pająk] — and continues to transmit it by promoting a given worldview in the social reception of readers. Accordingly, one affects [...] the very process of social construction of reality" (Pomorski 1998, p. 375).

The volume *Between History and the Theory of Education* presents the analyses of the methodological aspects of the issues discussed. The contributors position pedagogy and the history of education among cultural studies, simultaneously presenting the history of education which, as Krzysztof Maliszewski phrased it, can "[...] metamorphoze into a truly *pedagogical* discipline, capable of generating energy for development, opening a perspective of a better (ethics), more beautiful, profound (aesthetics) existence."

The second part includes texts presenting various modes of conceptualizing, representing, and narrating the pedagogical issues with respect to historical analyses, which testifies to the multiplicity and particularity of the ways in which the past realities are experienced by the researchers themselves. Finally, the third part in which the authors seek to find answers to the questions that have long been troubling contemporary pedagogues



— the ones concerning the crucial and discussion-triggering pedagogical categories: competency and authority, their comprehension, interpretation and meaning in education. These answers seem utterly impossible to be found without recourse to the current dialogue where cultural, humanistic, and historical perspectives intermingle.

*Agnieszka Stopińska-Pająk*

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The volume opens with a preface in which the Editor synthesizes the key points necessary for the readers to understand the work and its layout. For the aforesaid understanding, the assertion that modern-day pedagogy, “with regard to the sensitivity of this discipline, exceeds the limitations arising from its distinctness and undertakes to carry out an interdisciplinary analysis of educational phenomena athwart traditional divisions of academic disciplines” is essential. This assertion along with Immanuel Kant’s reflection that “history without theory is blind, whereas theory without history is empty” lead us to the contention expressed by Marc Depaepe that separating pedagogy from history of education, and vice versa, is a tendency both harmful and nonsensical, especially with the contemporary multidisciplinary trends in scientific research. Thus, as the Editor states herself, “participation in the discourse on what man is supposed to be like requires the theory of education to reflect the oeuvre of various sciences, especially Humanities, including the history of education.” This statement, in turn, notably corresponds to Wilhelm Dilthey’s thesis that man and humanity can be understood better through history and culture than through biopsychological experiments.

The aforequoted theses and contentions best reflect the Authors’ intentions as well as the contents of publications comprised in the volume being reviewed. Moreover, the work literally cautions against a sad, antiscientific trend towards transforming pedagogy into an applied study, which causes it to lose its identity and historicity. The discipline becomes deliberately, and fatally to itself, ahistorical. [...] The contents of the volume introduce, therefore, new thoughts and proposals of solutions as part of the ongoing discourse on the scientific status of pedagogy and its categories examining them from the humanistic, cultural, and historical perspectives.

*From the review by Professor Krzysztof Jakubiak*

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