

TEMA MONOGRÀFIC

What role can the history of education play in the framework of public history? Looking back on 50 years of involvement in educational historiography...

Quin paper pot jugar la història de l'educació en el marc de la història pública? Una mirada retrospectiva a 50 anys de participació en la historiografia educativa...

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RESUM

Aquest article sobre la relació entre la història de l'educació (és a dir, la meua pròpia investigació al llarg de les darreres cinc dècades) i la història pública fa referència al discurs d'obertura d'una trobada de la Societat d'Història de l'Educació dels Països de Llengua Catalana. En lloc d'enumerar aquí els paràgrafs successius, exposo breument les dues reflexions subjacents: (1) Tot i que no sóc un especialista en el camp de la «història pública», crec que qualsevol investigació històrica publicada, encara que els seus resultats apareguin només a revistes d'elit (d'alt nivell?) per a especialistes arriba a l'espai «públic». Però moltes persones –inclosos intel·lectuals– han perdut el contacte

amb les biblioteques i, per tant, també amb els llibres impresos i les revistes... La qual cosa, per descomptat, no impedeix que els mateixos autors s'esforcin per obrir els seus coneixements adquirits a un públic ampli, per exemple, mitjançant publicacions en el seu propi idioma (i no només en anglès), i/o mitjançant conferències, col·laborant en exposicions, etc. (2) En aquest sentit, he adquirit experiència principalment a través del món de l'educació i dels museus escolars. I allà he vist que molts museus, sovint també obligats pel govern que els patrocina, es desviuen per assolir els objectius d'una suposada missió educativa. Però si he après alguna cosa de la història de l'educació és que la veritable educació mai no funciona segons les estratègies preprogramades de cap pla didàctic. Més aviat, la *Bildung*, en l'antic sentit alemany de la paraula, ha de basar-se en veritables trobades. Per descomptat, això no impedeix que els museus escullin acuradament el seu material en funció d'aquest possible diàleg pedagògic, sense perdre de vista, però, el seu fonament científic. Més que més, com a llocs de treball per al desenvolupament d'aquest coneixement historicopedagògic, els museus també poden contribuir a aquesta tasca científica. El que alhora no ha de implicar una relació jeràrquica de les tasques científiques sobre les pedagògiques, per exemple, en termes de personal.

PARAULES CLAU: Història pública, història de l'educació, educació i museus escolars, educacionalització, *Bildung*.

ABSTRACT

The present article on the relationship between the history of education (i.e. my own research over the past five decades) and public history concerns the keynote address at a conference of the «Societat d'Història de l'Educació dels Països de Llengua Catalana». Rather than list the successive paragraphs here, I briefly state here the two underlying thoughts: (1) Even though I am not a specialist in the field of “public history,” I believe that any published historical research, even if its results appear only in elite (top?) journals for specialists, reaches the “public” space. But many people - including intellectuals - have lost their way to libraries, and thus also to printed books and journals... Which, of course, does not prevent authors themselves from making an effort to open up as much as possible their acquired knowledge to a wide public, for example, through publications in their own language (and not only in English), and/or through lectures, collaboration in exhibitions, and so on. (2) In the latter regard, I have gained experience mainly through the world of education and/or school museums. And there I have seen, that many museums, often also forced to do so by their patronizing government, go out of their way to realize the goals of a supposed

educational mission. But if I have learned anything from the history of education, it is that true education never works according to the pre-programmed strategies of any didactic plan. Rather, *Bildung*, in the old-fashioned German sense of the word, must rely on true encounters. Of course, this does not prevent museums from carefully choosing their material in function of such a possible pedagogical dialogue, without, however, losing sight of its scientific foundation. More even, as workplaces for the development of such historical-pedagogical knowledge, museums themselves can also contribute to this scientific job. Which in turn need not imply a hierarchical relationship of scientific over educational tasks, for example in terms of personnel.

KEYWORDS: Public history, educational history, education and school museums, educationalization, *Bildung*.

RESUMEN:

El presente artículo sobre la relación entre la historia de la educación (es decir, mi propia investigación a lo largo de las últimas cinco décadas) y la historia pública se refiere al discurso de apertura de un encuentro de la «Societat d'Història de l'Educació dels Països de Llengua Catalana». En lugar de enumerar aquí los párrafos sucesivos, expongo brevemente las dos reflexiones subyacentes: (1) Aunque no soy un especialista en el campo de la «historia pública», creo que cualquier investigación histórica publicada, aunque sus resultados aparezcan sólo en revistas de élite (¿de alto nivel?) para especialistas, llega al espacio «público». Pero muchas personas -incluidos intelectuales- han perdido el contacto con las bibliotecas y, por tanto, también con los libros impresos y las revistas... Lo cual, por supuesto, no impide que los propios autores se esfuercen por abrir sus conocimientos adquiridos a un público amplio, por ejemplo, mediante publicaciones en su propio idioma (y no sólo en inglés), y/o mediante conferencias, colaborando en exposiciones, etc. (2) En este sentido, he adquirido experiencia principalmente a través del mundo de la educación y/o de los museos escolares. Y allí he visto que muchos museos, a menudo también obligados a ello por el gobierno que los patrocina, se desviven por alcanzar los objetivos de una supuesta misión educativa. Pero si algo he aprendido de la historia de la educación es que la verdadera educación nunca funciona según las estrategias preprogramadas de ningún plan didáctico. Más bien, la *Bildung*, en el antiguo sentido alemán de la palabra, debe basarse en verdaderos encuentros. Por supuesto, esto no impide que los museos elijan cuidadosamente su material en función de ese posible diálogo pedagógico, sin perder de vista, no obstante, su fundamento científico. Más aún, como lugares de trabajo para el desarrollo de ese conocimiento histórico-pedagógico, los propios museos tam-

bién pueden contribuir a esa labor científica. Lo que a su vez no tiene por qué implicar una relación jerárquica de las tareas científicas sobre las pedagógicas, por ejemplo, en términos de personal.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Historia pública, historia de la educación, educación y museos escolares, educacionalización, *Bildung*.

1. INTRODUCTION

The reason for these reflections¹ goes back to our introduction to Sergi Moll in December 2022 in Macerata at the then SIPSE conference there. This contact led to his postdoctoral research in Belgium, in collaboration with our university and campus in Kortrijk: KU Leuven@Kulak.

The knowledge acquired in his PhD on the history of Catholic educational institutions was used as a basis for a specific project in the field of digital history and public history, in particular the creation of a web page related to the development of the Don Bosco Institute in Tournai and with the dissemination of the historical-pedagogical heritage of this institution.

We co-wrote a paper about this that was presented in Milan last December (2023) at the SIPSE conference and will soon be published in the proceedings of this conference.²

2. SOMETHING ABOUT PUBLIC HISTORY IN FLANDERS

I am certainly not a specialist in public history; however, I do have, through research and teaching, almost half a century of experience in the field of the

¹ These reflections were presented at a symposium, with the title *El compromís social de la història de l'educació*, organized by the *Societat d'Història de l'Educació dels Països de Llengua Catalana* on Thursday, 25th of April, 2024, at the University of the Balears in Palma de Mallorca.

² MOLL, S., DEPAEPE, M. «Historia pública y digital: una experiencia en torno al patrimonio histórico-educativo» [accepted for publication, contributions will be published in the SIPSE series «*Thesaurus Scholae. Sources and studies on the historical-educational heritage*» (<http://www.sipse.eu/collana-thesaurus-scholae>).

history of education.³ Nevertheless, at the aforementioned SIPSE conference in Milan, which was devoted to the subject of public history, I did listen diligently to what specialists had to say about it.⁴ From this I deduced that it is actually about making the results of academic research in history more accessible to the general public: history can no longer be an ivory tower and can therefore not only be limited to publications in top journals, but must also deliberately target the general public through media events, exhibitions, podcasts, radio and television broadcasts, and the like.

This discourse about public history is also far from unknown in Flanders. On the contrary, it has recently been used to initiate all kinds of projects in the (political-ideologically based) pursuit of more cultural “identity”, such as making a television series and publishing a “canon” about the history of Flanders (which is now also available in English).⁵ This led to a sometimes sharp debate among historians, who wanted to participate in such projects or not. Coincidence or not, but especially from professional historians who are also involved in (general) history education (for secondary schools), there was sometimes a strong reaction. In an extensive pamphlet from the Royal Academy, Jo Tollebeek, Marc Boone and Karel Van Nieuwenhuysse (with whom we published together with Frank Simon),⁶ among others, expressed their scathing views on the Flemish canon,⁷ even though in retrospect that publication turned out to be useful.

³ See, e.g., POLENGHI, S., BANDINI, G. «Interview with Marc Depaepe», *Espacio, Tiempo y Educación*, vol. 3, núm. 1 (2016), p. 445-453; this interview also appeared as POLENGHI, S., BANDINI, G. «The International Research in the History of Education. A Conversation with Marc Depaepe», in CAGNOLATI, HERNÁNDEZ HUERTA, J. L. (eds.). *In the Footsteps of the Masters. Interview with the History of Education*, Roma: Tab, 2021, p. 91-101; and see, for another interview, HERNÁNDEZ DÍAZ, J. M. «Conversación con Marc Depaepe. Historiador de la educación, Universidad Católica de Lovaina (Bélgica)», *Historia de la Educación*, vol. 39, núm. 1 (2020), p. 437-459.

⁴ For the full program of this conference, see: <http://www.sipse.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/III-SIPSE-CONFERENCE-14-15-December-2023.-Program.pdf>

⁵ *The Canon of Flanders in 60 Windows*, Ghent: Borgerhoff & Lamberigts, 2024.

⁶ VAN NIEUWENHUYSE, K., SIMON, F., DEPAEPE, M. «The Place of History in Teacher Training and in Education. A Plea for an Educational Future with a History, and Future Teachers with Historical Consciousness», *Bildungsgeschichte. International Journal for the Historiography of Education*, vol. 5, núm. 1 (2015), p. 57-69.

⁷ TOLLEBEK, J., BOONE, M., VAN NIEUWENHUYSE, K. *Een canon van Vlaanderen: motieven en bezwaren*, Brussels: KVAB Press, 2022.

It is perhaps equally striking that the famous “public historian” of Flanders, Bruno De Wever⁸ (in terms of history didactics, by the way, Frank Simon’s successor at the University of Ghent), did not lend himself to the canon and/or television series - even though he emphasizes that history can never be without obligation... But “instrumentalizing” it for political-ideological purposes (which are still intertwined with family ties) is in any case a bridge too far for him.⁹ He himself studied the Flemish collaboration past (of which his grandfather was also a part) and, unlike his younger brother, who is the leader of the admittedly most moderate of the two nationalist parties in Flanders,¹⁰ he certainly does not situate himself on the right-wing political spectrum...

3. TO WHAT EXTENT IS THIS RELATED TO OUR RESEARCH INTO THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION?

In our work we have for a good part shared the same fear of the “instrumentalization” of history – a theoretical, methodological and historiographical position, which we have discussed in many publications, and further shaped in our concrete research into the history of (Belgian) education (including colonial and post-colonial settings in the former Belgian Congo); partly as a result of the collaboration of several researchers from our research group.¹¹ (That is why we have continued to use the “we”-form in the following sentences).

Our position in the debates about the role, meaning and relevance of “historical pedagogy” (a term that we subsequently have replaced by “pedagogical or educational historiography”) arose from the study of

⁸ See, e.g., the Festschrift that was presented to him on the occasion of his retirement: AERTS, K., VAN GINDERACHTER, M.; VRINTS, A., WOUTERS, N. *De publieke historicus. Bruno De Wever en zijn vak*, Tiel: Lannoo, 2023.

⁹ See, e.g., DE WEVER, B. L. J. M., VRINTS, A., VERDOODT, F.-J. «Flemish Patriots and the Construction of the Nation: How the Flemish Nation Ceased to Be ‘Small’», *NISE Essays*, vol. 4, núm. 1 (2019), p. 56. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21825/nise.90265>

¹⁰ His Party is the N-VA (the «Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie», in English: «New-Flemish Alliance». Bart De Wever has recently been appointed by the king as formateur for a new Belgian federal government of which he could become prime minister. But this formation is not yet finished at the moment of the composition of this article (September, 5, 2024).

¹¹ See, among others, DEPAEPE, M. «The Ten Commandments of Good Practices in History of Education Research», *Zeitschrift für Pädagogische Historiographie*, vol. 16, núm. 1 (2010), p. 31-34.

developments within that field (and its use in education), on the basis of which we obtained the doctorate in educational sciences in 1982.¹² In that study we examined almost all theoretical-methodological discussions on the subject in Western Europe and the US (including the then GDR, which also gave us access to the Marxist-Leninist paradigms from the Eastern Bloc). And this from the end of the Second World War until the end of the 1970s. However, in order to understand the many differentiations related to the “use” of pedagogical historiography, we had to go back to the origins of the field in the second half of the 19th century (and even further!).¹³

4. ON THE “USES” AND “ABUSES” OF THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION

It is striking that in the course of the history of the “history of education” (as a teaching subject as well as research discipline) knowledge from the field was often used functionally for external objectives: pedagogical (e.g. for the training of teachers), as well as social (because both are of course not separated from each other). It is evident that this also had an influence on the nature of research in the history of education and its outcomes.¹⁴

A good illustration of this is the “revisionist” indictment of (the historian) Lawrence Cremin in the 1960s against (the educationalist) Ellwood Patterson Cubberley, who in the 1920s had described the rise of public education as the engine of American democracy, from which nothing but benefits for society

¹² The original PhD was written in Dutch. In the following notes, I will only refer to publications in English, German, French, and Spanish; not to those in Dutch. Only one chapter of this 1982 doctoral dissertation was published in English as a book, and, later on, this book has been translated into Spanish as well: DEPAEPE, M. *On the Relationship of Theory and History in Pedagogy. An introduction to the West German discussion on the significance of the history of education (1950-1980)*, Leuven: Universitaire Pers, 1983 [Studia Paedagogica, n.s., 6]; DEPAEPE, M. *Sobre las relaciones de la teoría y la historia de la pedagogía. Una introducción al debate en Alemania Occidental sobre la relevancia de la Historia de la Educación (1950-1980)*. Presentación de Juan Sáez y José García Molina, Valencia: Nau Llibres, 2007. [Linterna Pedagógica; Traducción de RODRÍGUEZ GONZÁLEZ, A., SÁEZ MOLERO, M.].

¹³ See, e.g., DEPAEPE, M., VAN CROMBRUGGE, H. «Using or Abusing the Educational Past?—Some methodological reflections on the Place of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi in the Educational Historiography», in GEHRIG, H. (ed.). *Pestalozzi in China. International Academic Symposium on the Occasion of the Publication of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi's Selected Works in Chinese*, Zürich: Pestalozzianum, 1995, p. 51-62; and, more general, DEPAEPE, M. «Demythologizing the Educational Past. An endless task in history of education », in LOWE, R. (ed.). *History of Education: Major Themes*, vol. I: *Debates in the History of Education*, London/ New York, Routledge, 2000, p. 356-370 [Major Themes in Education].

¹⁴ DEPAEPE, M. «Entre pédagogie et histoire. Questions et remarques sur l'évolution des objectifs de l'enseignement de l'histoire de l'éducation», *Histoire de l'éducation*, núm. 77 (1998), p. 3-18.

had emerged. According to Cremin, such a rosy vision was (cf. his book about the “wonderful world” of EP Cubberley) the result of a one-sided treatment of history, in which a number of “methodological” errors (indicated by him as “sins”!) had crept in: evangelism, parochialism and presentism.¹⁵ In concrete terms: according to Cremin, Cubberley wanted to proclaim too much the message of salvation by schooling, but did not see that the school was far from the only “educator” (churches, libraries, journals, etc. also played an important role in the emancipation of people), nor that that vision was inspired by a contemporary defensive reflex to protect public education, which led to all kinds of ahistorical interpretations.

The influence of this revisionism can hardly be underestimated... In a sense, from the 1960s and 1970s onwards, this movement led to a “paradigm change” in the history of education research, in the sense that the mother bond with pedagogy was increasingly abandoned in favor of a connection with social historiography, which would later (in the 1980s and 1990s), under the influence of new theoretical points of view (the imitation of the grand theory à la Foucault, for example) be supplemented with a rapprochement with cultural historiography.¹⁶

In the so-called radical revisionism in the US (promulgated by Michael Katz and others)¹⁷, Cubberley’s thesis was in fact reversed: the school was no longer the cause of all virtues, but all the vices that meritocracy brought with it: poverty, social exclusion, racism, sexism, and so on. In the context of this “committed” historiography – no matter how meritorious the values pursued may have been – dealing with the pedagogical past thus became very “functional” again and it also had to convey a contemporary (political-ideological) message...

¹⁵ CREMIN, L. A. *The Wonderful world of Ellwood Patterson Cubberley: an essay on the historiography of American education*, New York: Teachers College, Columbia university, 1965. His critique was mainly against the book of CUBBERLEY, E. P. *The History of Education. Educational practice and progress considered as a phase of the development and spread of western civilization*, published in 1920. See in this respect, also, COHEN, S. «The History of the History of American Education, 1900-1976: The Uses of the Past», *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 46, núm. 3 (1976), p. 298-330.

¹⁶ See, among others, DEPAEPE, M. *Vieja y nueva historia de la educación. Ensayos críticos*, Barcelona: Octaedro, 2006 [Colección educación, historia y crítica].

¹⁷ KATZ, M. B. *Reconstructing American Education*, Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1989.

5. FUNCTIONALITY AS A CHARACTERISTIC OF THE ENTIRE HISTORY OF THE FIELD (OF HISTORY OF EDUCATION)?

Is that functionality a constantly recurring pattern in the history of educational historiography? Because we saw it emerge on both sides of the political-ideological spectrum: at the “extreme left” as well as at “extreme right” sides. In the Soviet-Russian space, for example, where history and theory were inextricably linked in function of the teleological end goal of a society free of social classes. But also within the context of the normative-dogmatic Catholic pedagogy in Flanders, which was just as haughtily able to determine which supra-historical educational values should be extracted from educational history (and in that sense, despite all the contradictions in the goals pursued) was akin to all fascist educational projects (including those of the National Socialists). And we also got to know them in South Africa, where we met the offshoots of the African “paedagogia perennis” from the apartheid regime...¹⁸

Such functionality (related to the pursuit of extrinsic goals) appears to be inextricably linked to the origins of the field. History of striking pedagogical ideas and their elaboration in a national educational system, partly in the absence of other approaches, gradually became the curricular center of teacher training in the 19th century.. It had to contribute, as in France, but also in Belgium (which was inspired from the French), to the moral awareness of teachers about their high mission.¹⁹

6. MORE CONTINUITY IN TEACHING HISTORY OF EDUCATION THAN IN HISTORY OF EDUCATION RESEARCH?

In connection with the question of the possible continuity of that functionality (so to speak the history of education as a handmaiden of external goals), we have developed the proposition that this trend was greater in the teaching of “history of pedagogy” (mainly conceived as history of educational

¹⁸ DEPAEPE, M. «My way to the new ‘cultural’ history of education: from ‘historical pedagogy’ to the history of ‘educational mentalities’», in COETZEE, J. H., SMITH, T. H. (eds). *International Conference on Education and Change. A selection of papers of a conference held in September 1995 at Unisa, Pretoria*, Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1996, p. 1-11.

¹⁹ DEPAEPE, M. «Entre pédagogie et histoire...» *op. cit.*

ideas, principles, theories, and so on, but also history of national educational systems) than in research about it.

As mentioned, in the last decades of the 20th century, research increasingly connected with history, partly because historians (in addition to traditional “historical” pedagogues) also began to recognize the importance of pedagogical phenomena (such as the history of child) for the general history of mentality and culture. A new wind that also was translated worldwide with the establishment of national and international associations and journals for this field of study. But this did not prevent the fact that, despite greater attention to the socio-cultural connections and implications of education in history, there were still many differences with regard to the use of history, among others, in relation to theory development. (but we can’t go into that further here).²⁰

7. YET ALSO CHANGES IN THE TEACHING OF EDUCATIONAL HISTORY...?

This change to a more socio-historical orientation was much less noticeable in the teaching of the history of education, than in the research of the history of education. If it did occur in the teaching, it was much later... Initially, one more or less stuck to manuals, encyclopedias, courses, and so, which were mainly conceived as a walk through the gallery of great educators, from which “lessons” could be learned for the future... However, as the socio-historical orientation crept into the teaching of the educational history, its relevance for the whole of the educational sciences was increasingly questioned. Which meant that the “usefulness” and “sense” of history apparently had to be demonstrated again in the context of the curriculum of pedagogical training for teachers or professional pedagogues and educators.

This led, if not to the abolition of the discipline, at least to its marginalization in the educational curriculum. Certainly because more “sexy” approaches in the pedagogical sciences – empirical-analytical ones with its promises for “evidence-based” and/or “evidence-informed” solutions to current problems – started to be dominant (besides the increasingly

²⁰ DEPAEPE, M. «Epilogue: Paedagogica Historica, Quo Vadis?», *Paedagogica Historica*, vol. 58, núm. 6 (2022), p. 974-985.

dominance of psychology).²¹ Thus, the old “historical pedagogy” shifted from the center to the far end of the periphery as far as pedagogical interest was concerned...

8. OUR VIEWS OF TEACHING AND RESEARCHING THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION

As far as our own research and teaching in the history of education are concerned, we have always defended its intrinsic importance: critical historical research that presupposes some distance from the present and its practical problems often puts these problems into perspective and nuances the breathless quest for relevance and usefulness of history...²²

In no way history of education can be a kind of recipe book, nor is it the “handmaiden” of theory (which of course does not exclude the pursuit of theoretical awareness within the field of educational history, for example by forging and using conceptual keys from the history of education itself to better understand the educational past). In this sense, the history of education, for example, has the same potential of the history of medicine, which does not provide ready-made answers for doctors, but at best makes them think about the relativity of the often expensively fought for positions?

During our career we have striven to tell the best possible “story” about the pedagogical past, by combining as many sources as possible (also in order to extract normality – everydayness – from the often great normativity of those sources); self-evidently also inspired by relevant literature and associated theoretical concepts, without being fanatical about them and becoming a slave to them.²³

These points of view have not only been implemented in our research, but also in our teaching (of the history of education), as – certainly at the university level – teaching has to be based on academic research...

²¹ See, for example, SMEYERS, P., DEPAEPE, M. «The Lure of Psychology for Education and Educational Research», *Journal of Educational Philosophy*, vol. 46, núm. 3 (2012), p. 315-331.

²² For example DEPAEPE, M. «Sometimes a little distance is needed to see what really happened. The study of the Belgian educational policy in Congo as an example of the critical vigour of colonial history of education», in AUBRY, C., GEISS, M., MAGYAR-HAAS, V., MILLER, D. (eds.) *Positionierungen. Zum Verhältnis von Wissenschaft, Pädagogik und Politik*, Weinheim/Basel: Beltz Juventa, 2012, p. 219-232.

²³ DEPAEPE, M. «Why even today educational historiography is not an unnecessary luxury. Focusing on four themes from forty-four years of research», *Espacio, Tiempo y Educación*, vol. 7, núm. 1 (2020), p. 227-246.

9. SOME METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

In our opinion, such a dialogue with history (which presupposes the ability to move, to empathize with another time and space) is best done “multidisciplinary”, i.e. in a “team” and with specialists of different origins. Something that can also be taken literally, people with different backgrounds, not only in terms of research discipline, but also in terms of origin and philosophy of life - although of course the historical research itself remains the binding agent for the teamwork!²⁴

Such different “perspectives” in approach more or less guarantee the elimination of the many subjective influences in historical research that can of course never be excluded (involvement, engagement, place of origin, situational determination), but which doesn't have to get in the way of the pursuit of objectivation... Hence our attention to a depersonalized history of education with an emphasis on the influence of structural processes (e.g. in the history of educational innovations), which can also demonstrate its indirect relevance: by pointing out the relativity of the terms “old” and “new” in the history of education, the constant “appropriation” of so-called innovative ideas and ditto theories and systems (such as Steiner, Freinet, etc.), the limited role of teachers within structural and innovation-resistant “grammars”, such as the “grammar of schooling” and “educationalization”, etc...²⁵

10. RETURNING TO PUBLIC HISTORY...

Based on these theoretical-methodological concerns, we do not at all agree with what was stated at the recent SIPSE conference in Milan by an authority in public history raised there: in our opinion, public history is not an applied science at all! Historical and historical-pedagogical knowledge should not be

²⁴ DEPAEPE, M., SIMON, F. «Sources in the Making of Histories of Education: proofs, arguments, and other reasonings from the historian's workplace», in SMEYERS, P., DEPAEPE, M. (eds). *Educational Research: Proofs, Arguments, and Other Reasonings*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2009, p. 23-39.

²⁵ Just to give one example: VAN RUYSKENSVELDE, S., HULSTAERT, K., DEPAEPE, M., «The Cult of Order. In search of the underlying patterns of the colonial and neo-colonial 'grammar of educationalization' in Belgian Congo. Exported school rituals and routines?», *Paedagogica Historica*, vol. 53, núm. 1-2, 2017, p. 36-48.

“applied” as such...²⁶! Naturally, we agree that historical research should not limit itself to publications (in highly ranked journals), but can make an effort to bring itself closer to the public... which is why we have also contributed to the vulgarization and popularization of the knowledge that our research has yielded. Insofar as “society” have wanted to call on our competencies, we have always said “yes”, and contributed to podcasts, interviews on radio and television, in newspapers, etc.; more specifically, during the Corona period (2021), we also spoke, on a national level, to the heritage specialists of Flanders, who dedicated National Heritage Day in 2022 to school heritage.²⁷

But our most important contribution to the broader public was, at the beginning, our involvement in the working group for the Municipal Education Museum in Ypres (for which the foundation was laid in 1980 with an exhibition on the history of popular education in Belgium and from 1990 to 2016 has existed)²⁸ – a “museum” expertise which was moreover regularly called upon from abroad.²⁹

²⁶ Which is a explicit critique against the intervention of Pierre Noiret as a “discussant” during the Roundtable: «The Public History of Education Manifestos» at the 3rd SIPSE Conference in Milan, December 14, 2023.

²⁷ See my conference on the state of the art of history of education and educational memory in Flanders, during the Corona-time: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wsb9dhB5XjQ>.

²⁸ DEPAEPE, M. «Like a voice in the wilderness? Striving for a responsible handling of the educational heritage», in HERMAN, F., BRASTER, S., DEL POZO ANDRÉS, M. M. (eds). *Exhibiting the Past: Public Histories of Education*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Oldenburg: 2022, p. 39-57; DEPAEPE, M., SIMON, F. «It's All About Interpretation: Discourses at Work in Education Museums. The Case of Ypres», in SMEYERS, P., DEPAEPE, M. (eds). *Educational Research: Discourses of Change and Change of Discourse*, [Cham]: Springer International Publishing Switzerland, 2016, p. 207-222 [Educational Research, 9].

²⁹ DEPAEPE, M., SIMON, F. «Sobre el futuro del pasado de la educación: museos de la enseñanza y su relación con la historia de la educación – el caso de Ypres», in BADANELLI RUBIO, A.M., POVEDA SANZ, M., RODRÍGUEZ GUERREO, C. (eds). *Pedagogía Museística. Prácticas, usos didácticos e investigación del patrimonio educativo. Actas de las VI Jornadas Científicas de la Sociedad Española para el Estudio del Patrimonio Histórico Educativo (SEPHE)*, Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Facultad de Educación, 2014, p. 35-43; CATTEEUW, K., DEPAEPE, M., SIMON, F. «Divulgação interactiva de material didáctico. Ambições museológicas e científicas de projecto “Memória educativa da Flandres”», in FERNANDES, R., LOURO FELGUEIRAS, M. (eds). *A Escola Primária: entre imagem e a memória. Projecto “Museu Vivo da Escola Primeira”. Seminário Internacional - Commynicações. Fundação Dr. António Cupertino de Miranda 27 e 28 de Novembro, Porto, 1998*, Porto: Imprensa e Acabamento Gráficos Reunidos, 2000, 49-57; CATTEEUW, K., DEPAEPE, M., SIMON, F. «The Educational Memory of Flanders», *Mitteilungen & Materialien. Zeitschrift für Museum und Bildung*, núm. 49 (1998), p. 73-77.

11. HISTORY OF SCHOOL AND/OR EDUCATION MUSEUMS

Without advocating a one-to-one relationship, I see similar development patterns in the history of educational museums as in the evolution of what should be its underlying scientific discipline: the history of education. Here too, the evolution went “from practical-pedagogical to cultural-historical,” according to the subtitle of a thesis about the national school museum in the Netherlands.³⁰

Historically speaking, school museums (which were often created in connection with world exhibitions) emerged in the course of the 19th C. as didactic centers: a place where all kinds of resources were exhibited, with which effective learning and teaching could be achieved (in all kinds of sectors and disciplines) - a bit comparable to the contemporary forums where ICT and AI are promoted today!

Museums received new impetus in Europe and beyond during the 1970s and 1980s, influenced by rural depopulation (e.g. in France and Spain), but also by larger-scale school projects (merging several institutions), and the introduction of new educational resources (digitalization) and contemporary furniture. As a consequence “old schools” disappeared... which fed the nostalgia among retired teachers, who often work as (indispensable) volunteers for the school museums. A witness of this is the widespread practice of ‘playing’ ‘the school of yesteryear’ in those museums, which is incidentally appears to have great entertainment value, both for seniors and children...

12. RINCPLES OF CONTEMPORARY SCHOOL AND/OR EDUCATION MUSEUMS

The basis of this nostalgia is usually, explicitly or implicitly, a strong connection with the education system and the school as an institution. At one point, when we tried to illustrate, on a research basis, the “irony of educational

³⁰ Quoted in DEPAEPE, M. Über den Bildungswert von Schulmuseen, in BALCKE, D., BENECKE, J., RICHTER, A., SCHMID, M., SCHULZ-GADE, H. (eds). *Bildungsmedien im wissenschaftlichen Diskurs. Festschrift für Eva Matthes zum 60. Geburtstag*, Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt, 2022, p. 369-378, on which some of the ideas in the following paragraphs are based.

innovation” in one of the Ypres’ exhibitions, a former inspector remarked that a school museum could not and should not be against the school!³¹

In any case, museums in general (and educational museums in particular?) are still profiled today as institutions with a pedagogical-didactic mission (which also emerges from evaluations and self-evaluations): they must have valuable and generally accepted pedagogical goals (peace instead of war, citizenship education), which can be achieved, among others, by “remembrance education”. But remembering and memory are not the same as history, let alone historical research, which should provide valid data and interpretations for the design of school museums and its exhibitions, where of course individual and/or collective memories (collected through oral or written history) also can be used as “sources” for those exhibitions.

And if these sources, as remnants and artefacts of the educational past, convey a ‘message’, then it is certainly an uncoded message that must be transformed by the visitors themselves into an individual/collective experience(s), which may have formative effects. I will come back to that in a moment, but let me say first something more about the potential relationship of educational museums with history of education research.

13. SCHOOL AND/OR EDUCATION MUSEUMS AS RESEARCH LABORATORIES? TOWARDS A WIN-WIN SITUATION WITH HERITAGE WORK?

Following what has been argued above, we have always insisted that school museums should have a scientific basis. Conversely, they can also contribute to history of education research in various ways, for example by collecting material sources and using them in research (school desks are a good example of this).³²

The confrontation with often forgotten sources can give rise to new questions for the research; the same applies to the practical testimonies or experiences of the volunteers who carry out heritage work there.

³¹ DEPAEPE, M., «The fragile boundary between “education” and “educationalization”: some personal reflections on the often exaggerated educational aspirations of museums», *Historia y Memoria de la Educación*, núm. 15 (2022), p. 389-419.

³² DEPAEPE, M, SIMON, F, VERSTRAETE, P «Valorising the Cultural Heritage of the School Desk Through Historical Research», in SMEYERS, P, DEPAEPE, M. (ed.). *Educational Research: Material Culture and Its Representation*, Cham/Heidelberg/New York/Dordrecht & London: Springer, 2014, p. 13-30 (Educational Research, 8).

In this sense, I have repeatedly argued that museums should be regarded as workplaces for history of education research – laboratories in the true sense of the word – and that museum staff, professional or not, should be considered full partners in the research group. Their experience allows them not only to help visualize difficult content and ideas, but also to open new perspectives regarding questions and hypotheses, as well as regarding the implementation and interpretation of research results. In any case, it is essential to avoid a hierarchical juxtaposition between practitioners and academics!³³

In short, giving priority to the research mission of school museums – or in other words allowing their historical ‘mission’ to prevail over the ‘pedagogical’ one – seems to me essential for their continued existence (even as educational institutions!), a “message” which is of course not always as easy to defend in these days...³⁴

14. THE TRUE “EDUCATIONAL” VALUE [*BILDUNGSWERT*] OF SCHOOL AND/OR EDUCATION MUSEUMS...

Ultimately, pedantic tours through the history of education are of little use to the visitor - with or without the raised finger of a know-it-all guide who judges and condemns the past based on some kind of supra-historical standard; nor to pre-elaborated plans, full of well-intentioned pedagogical objectives that must be carried out according to pre-refined didactic procedures and/or strategies (a term incidentally associated with ‘conquest’ and ‘war’)... The visitor is not a machine whose ideas can be programmed, by a technological input and an output model...

That’s not how real education works. “*Bildung*” in the traditional sense of the word cannot really be planned and is therefore difficult to predict; which

³³ DEPAEPE, M. «How can history of education research improve the valorisation of the educational heritage and vice versa?» in MEDA, J., PACIARONI, L., SANI, R. (eds.). *The School and its Many Pasts*, vol. II: MEDA, J., SANI, R. (eds.). *Official and Public Memories of Schools*, Macerata: Edizioni Università di Macerata, 2024, p. 477-486.

³⁴ See, e.g., DEPAEPE, M. «Au bas de la liste des priorités? Quelques réflexions personnelles sur le traitement du patrimoine scolaire en Belgique», in *Première rencontre francophone des musées de l'école*. Actes Rouen 2016, Rouen: Le Musée national de l'éducation [Munané], 2018, p. 65-75.

does not prevent its effects from being liberating.³⁵ For example, when you are confronted with well-chosen and prepared material. The intention is not really to ‘win’ people to a point of view or belief. But to enter into dialogue with him. Let them think for themselves and decide what impression or outcome this confrontation will leave...

In my publications I have given the example of the experience of sexuality: the confrontation with the problems that people have had about it in educational circles must in any case appear relativizing and/or ironic to current generations.³⁶ Another example is a well-presented exposition on the ‘grammar of educationalization’, which at best can demonstrate excessively high social expectations for educational institutions, which in turn can have a liberating effect on teachers...³⁷

15. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AS TRUE EDUCATION [OR BILDUNG], NOTWITHSTANDING THE REMAINING QUEST FOR UTILITY

This inevitably brings me back to the core question of my lecture, or at least to a paraphrase of it: to what extent can the public learn something from the history of education? Apart from the fact that the history of education can show that the persistent demand for “learning” and useful content is in itself a product of the Enlightenment, it can also show that little by little we have come to expect more from educational institutions: the school as well as museums themselves...; that a kind of pedagogization of social life is taking place: social problems must increasingly be solved through education (and this requires, of

³⁵ See, in this respect, also: DEPAEPE, M. «Jenseits der pädagogischen Illusion? Historisch-vergleichende Überlegungen zur Wirkungsgeschichte der moralischen Bildung von Kindern und Jugendlichen. Vortrag zum Empfang der Comenius-Medaille für mein langjähriges Engagement in der historisch-pädagogischen Forschung», *Historia Scholastica*, vol. 9, núm. 2 (2023), p. 11-57; DEPAEPE, M., HULSTAERT, K. «Demythologising the educational past: an attempt to assess the “power” of education in the Congo (DRC) with a nod to the history of interwar pedagogy in Catholic Flanders», *Paedagogica Historica*, vol. 51, núm. 1-2 (2015), p. 11-29, and, more generally, SOUTHWELL, M., DEPAEPE, M. «The relation between education and emancipation: something like water and oil? Introducing the special issue», *Paedagogica Historica*, vol. 55, núm. 1 (2019), p. 1-7.

³⁶ DEPAEPE, M. «Über den Bildungswert...» *op. cit.*

³⁷ DEPAEPE, M. «Dealing with Paradoxes of Educationalization. Beyond the Limits of “New” Cultural History of Education», *Revista Educação & Cidadania*, vol. 7, núm. 2 (2008), p. 11-31; DEPAEPE, M., SIMON, F. «Sobre la pedagogización... Desde la perspectiva de la historia de la educación», *Espacios En Blanco. Revista de Educación*, núm. 18 (2008), p. 101-130.

course, more and more time, resources, institutions, people,...).³⁸ At the same time, the history of education can also show that this “educationalization” process has not always had the effects it intended. On the contrary. In the area of personal development, for example, it can lead to more dependency instead of more autonomy.³⁹ Not to mention the loss of the emotional and cultural if we focus exclusively on acquiring useful (historical) knowledge in personal development (which, as shown by today’s handling of the educational past in social media, often leads to overgeneralization, to simplistic dichotomies that leave no room for nuance, and so on...)

That is why I would like to end with a quote from von Hentig, not because I am in favor of this controversial educationalist, but because it expresses in German so beautifully what I want to say here:

Jedenfalls kann Bildung nutzen. Der Hauptnutzen erwächst aus dem Nutzlosen – der Welt des “schönen Scheins”, dem Spiel der Fantasie, der Musik. In der Dichtung, in der geformten und gedeuteten Erfahrung lässt sich sowohl Schutz, Heilung, ein Heimathafen für die angeschlagene Seele und auch Anlass und Anleitung zu Abwehr und Aufstand finden. Nicht minder wichtig ist die Festigung der eigenen Position durch das “Wissen anderer”. Anschauung, Warnung und Rat werden dem zuteil, dem Bildung nicht in erster Linie Besitz bedeutet, sondern Eröffnung von Möglichkeiten; er wird suchend, prüfend, urteilend, erfindend, sich bescheidend und sich sammelnd am Ende seine Sicherheit wiederfinden. Vor allem aber kann er seinen Sinn wandeln – auf die einstige Sicherheit verzichten. Kurz: Bildung und ihre Hilfgesellen machen ihn gegenüber den “Verhältnissen” frei, in denen er sich befindet. Aber vielleicht ist das doch nur wieder eine Umdeutung des Wortes “nützlich”...⁴⁰

³⁸ See, more particularly, DEPAEPE, M., SMEYERS, P. «Educationalization as an ongoing modernization process», *Educational Theory*, vol. 43, núm. 4 (2008), p. 379-389.

³⁹ VON HENTIG, H. «Ist Bildung nützlich?», in KEINER, E. et al. (eds). *Metamorphosen der Bildung. Historie – Empirie – Theorie*, Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt, 2011, p. 395-412.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 411, translated into English: «In any case, education can be useful. The main benefit comes from the useless - the world of “beautiful appearances”, the play of imagination, music. In poetry, in formed and interpreted experience, one can find protection, healing, a home for the battered soul as well as a reason and guideline for defense and rebellion. No less important is the consolidation of one’s own position through the “knowledge of others”. For whom education does not primarily mean, but rather the opening of possibilities, receives insight, warning and advice; he eventually regains his certainty by searching, investigating, judging, inventing, deciding and collecting himself. But above all, he can change his mind - renouncing his former certainty. In short, education and its assistants free him from the “circumstances” he finds himself in. But perhaps this is just another reinterpretation of the word “useful”».