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The economy of the history of education: In search of a good presence of history in pedagogical thought

The question of how to practice pedagogical theory and approach its history is not one of a merely methodological nature. To formulate it provides the chance to verify our ethical responsibility not only for the effectiveness of our ad hoc actions or the future generations of youth and academics but also for our own cultural existence.

Lech Witkowski (2009, p. 170)

I do not ask *whether* to think like a pedagogue but *how* to think like a pedagogue. [...] Every human being thinks and thus transgresses the limitations of one's own place and time by stepping into the future, turning back to the past and piercing the surface of phenomena with one's insight.

Bogusław Śliwowski (2010, p. 7)

Introduction

The word “economy” invoked in the title demands explanation of a considerably greater complexity than the colloquial usage of the term would grant us. Accordingly, I would like to begin with offering such an explanation. The etymology of the word *economy*, and therefore its primary meaning, does not refer to the financial register but mostly to a space one could call domestic — a household, and to the rules governing this very space. I owe this philological line of reasoning to Michał Paweł Markowski and so would like a fragment of his book to shed some light on the poignancy of this notion rather than a dry dictionary passage: “Economy is *oiko-nomia*, a law — *nomos*, regulating the management of the household — *oikos*. This law concerns the exchange of

goods between the outside (world) and the inside (household) in accordance with precise rules two of which seem especially relevant in this context:

1. The household is a space of exchange of goods coming from the outside world for the ones to be assimilated: a random thing brought to the household either becomes domesticated by becoming part of the household system, its equipment or decoration, or is digested, all depending on the function it is to fulfill.
2. *The minister or steward — Oikodespotes* is a person managing the circulation of goods and decides on what is included in domestic circulation and therefore is assimilated." (Markowski, 2004, p. 383–384)

Let us then treat the categories elaborated upon by Markowski as an occasion to deepen the meanings characteristically associated with the discourse on education. If one was to think of *the household* in such terms, then what immediately springs to mind is the question of the persona of the administrator of this estate, the one who gets to decide on its economy of knowledge, which points to the elements desirable for circulation in the pedagogical discourse, to things worthy of academic domestication and study. The *oikodespotes* (Gr. despótēs — ‘master’) operates not only by picking what is to be included but also simultaneously by silencing, denouncing or disqualifying what is not (though in a more obscure manner). If something does not meet the standards for assimilation in the eyes of the housemaster it should be (re)jected as waste. It seems justifiable to claim that the authors of textbooks have always been the ones who managed discourse in such a manner, not only in the context of the history of education. Books of this type can be considered one of the most effective instruments of knowledge management, chiefly thanks to being widely reproduced. The didactic character of a textbook virtually makes it the main medium for the histories of education, or even the only source of knowledge about history for the students, teachers and pedagogues in general.

The nagging issues regarding the quality of lectures and laboratories conducted as per the current curricula and the voices advocating for giving academics the chance to share their own academic findings casts a shadow of doubt onto the alleged value and benefits of feeding students with textbook summaries; the knowledge thus acquired is not even of a second-hand quality but, which might often be the case, a thing dry and alien.

Depending on how the authors manage the contents of their textbook discussions and summaries with respect to the history of education some categories of their employment can be distinguished. The predominant one could be labeled *nourishment* — concepts and their actualizations that have proven important for the contemporary and has influenced the present thinking on education. The second serve as *decorations* — the relics of the past mentioned solely by way of courtesy, for the aesthetics of their narration

to inspire stylistic awareness or to foster erudition. In terms of the 'master's' operations these two demarcate the limits of acceptability. Yet let us not forget about exclusion at work in this economy. The categories subject to the negative operations are *waste* — elements of theory which are still applicable but not fitting within the totality of contemporary educational reality and *trash* — the reflections, stories or theories considered worthless or even detrimental to the present and future of pedagogical thought.

The above begs the question on the point of including history in pedagogical discourse. It is in fact a question that never ceases to be current but also requires particular attentiveness or even care, as Lech Witkowski (2009, pp. 172–173) points out: "It is good to be wary of the constantly recurrent threat of a cultural uprooting of the present, of forgetting history or ever forgetting [...] the very oblivion which erases the traces of bygone presence, leaving us with an ontologically impoverished reality where the more we lack the less the lack is visible and felt as this "annulment" makes people blind as to the extent of the desolation of the superficiality of their experience which is devoid of any insight." This catastrophic vision is all but ill-founded — the underestimation of the history of education in pedagogical discourse is not a threat but a lived reality. The lack of variety in research methodologies and strong antiquarian tendencies reflective of a factual approach to the history of education are reason enough to be alarmed.

In this context, the research conducted by Sławomir Sztobryn (2000) gains all the more importance, particularly his study of the analyses of texts dedicated to the history of education published in interwar periodicals as seen from a metahistorical perspective. Such a perspective seems crucial for nurturing a deep methodological consciousness in the field of pedagogy. We are therefore dealing here with "a synthetic type of scientific research that refers to the epistemological field, that is, a holistic approach to the objectivized creative work of a group of intellectuals studying certain ideas, standpoints, and tendencies within pedagogy and its history at a particular time and place (Sztobryn, 2000, pp. 16–17). The method consists in a certain distancing of the theoretical perspective which allows thinking to employ a wider range of actions and historiographic strategies. Even the historical sources for the history of education can be the basis for the ethics of reading the past and become a methodological breath of fresh air, so to speak. The late pedagogues can not only stimulate thinking on the present state of education in a potentially vital way but by turning to them one can see what might be called meta-inspiration (though the name might be considered rather unfortunate) — the ways of the intellectual exploitation of the history of education. To elaborate on the uses and misuses of historical sources let us now take a closer look at the works of late fellow academics — Henryk Rowid and Bogdan Suchodolski.

The historio-educational meta-tropes

Władysława Szulakiewicz (2000, p. 159) considers Henryk Rowid one of the “professionals in the field of education.” Szulakiewicz (p. 89) points to his commitment during the interwar historical conventions (1925 in Poznań, 1930 in Lviv, and 1935 in Vilnius) which showed his characteristic approach to the history of education for which, he believed, the education of teachers was crucial. Such a perspective was also elaborated in some of his papers. The article entitled “The didactics of pedagogical subjects in teacher training centers,” which is a clear presentation of the role of history of education in shaping the personality of the tutor and building the culture of pedagogy is worth mentioning (Rowid, 1936). In his last book, Rowid formulated the following words: “Just as other sciences, pedagogy has a history of its own that studies the development of pedagogical ideas and doctrines as well as of educational institutions in the context of the totality of socio-cultural relations, including the theoretical work and practical accomplishments of the prominent pedagogues of the past. Were it not for the additional focus on the contemporary state of affairs one could say that the history of the discipline fulfills the same tasks as comparative (international) pedagogy” (Rowid, 1957, p. 61). Rowid thus distinguishes three elements of the history of education.¹ As much as the first two seem to share a certain field of knowledge, the third one — the comparative method — apart from pointing to knowledge on the present is also separate in terms of a methodological criterion.² What is more, a certain insistence on methodological and practical

¹ Or to be more precise, as Władysława Szulakiewicz rightly points out, on the history of pedagogy, which testifies to the influence of German pedagogy on Rowid’s thinking (W. Szulakiewicz: *Historia oświaty i wychowania...*, p. 113).

² The interwar period in Poland was a time of stabilizing the inner structure of the history of education. One of the effects of the changes of those times was the proposition of discipline division formulated by Bogdan Suchodolski, which happened right after World War II. Sztobryn’s proposition, later enriched by Sławomir Sztobryn, to include the meta-history of education, corresponds to Rowid’s vision in all aspects but one — Rowid points to comparative pedagogy while Suchodolski emphasizes the importance of cultural history which as such evokes the context of cultural pedagogies. Yet, this might be an illusory difference. Although it would require a more in-depth analysis to support such a claim, it appears to me that both the character and the contents of the pedagogy of culture are founded chiefly on *academic caution*, that is, on a certain methodological attitude (situating cultural issues at the center of attention by its representatives might prove broad to such an extent that it ceases to be distinctive). Thus, the inclusion of cultural history into the scope of pedagogical history by Suchodolski not only widens the field of research but, most importantly, is a methodological postulate close to comparative research stressed by Rowid. Accordingly, it is important to consider the visions of education by Rowid and Suchodolski as the common ground of their work. (See also:

awareness and caution towards one-sidedness is marked here, which is deemed by Monika Jaworska-Witkowska to be an approach Rowid took after Bronisław Trentowski (Jaworska-Witkowska, 2009).

To acknowledge the blurriness of the line between a synchronic and a diachronic perspective (the theory and history of education) and their cohesiveness, while emphasizing and problematizing the methodological contexts is not only a great theoretical strategy but an axiom resulting from the specificity of the historical thinking in pedagogy. Within the wider context of Rowid's texts one should pay close attention to the insistence on a biographical strategy in historio-educational narration and the concept of a "selective approach to the educational past." This concept opens the possibility of writing a "living" history, prevents one from falling prey to antiquarianism which would have history written as a series of museum exhibits and, as Władysława Szulakiewicz notes, testifies to the affinity of thinking between Henryk Rowid and Bogdan Suchodolski. Yet it appears that the ultimate mark of the closeness of their oeuvre is a well-understood actualism both of them display. When commenting on Rowid's analyses of Trentowski's work, Wiesław Andrukowicz (2006, pp. 117–118) came to the following conclusion: "[...] he was trying to determine not only who were the preceptors of Trentowski's pedagogy, but also who will be his successors and, which is indubitably Rowid's greatest achievement, his comments portrayed him as the man who established a theory well founded in history but also on the cutting-edge pedagogical tendencies."

The introduction to Rowid's best known book *Szkoła twórcza* [*The Creative School*] is also an interesting space of the encounter between Rowid and Suchodolski. The latter thickly weaves the narration of the introduction but simultaneously goes far beyond the contents of the book to touch upon the metacontextual issues, sketching a vision of the history of education itself and its ways of telling its own stories. The tension between the genre of the text and its contents is somewhat intriguing, and perhaps a little perverse. It would now be hardly imaginable — bearing in mind the present day workings of the book market — to publish a book whose introduction is as critical towards the rest of the contents as was the one included in the 1958 edition of *Szkoła twórcza* (Suchodolski, 1958, Introduction to Rowid). That aside, even

B. Suchodolski: *Stosunek pedagogiki do historii wychowania*. In *Pamiętnik VII Powszechnego Zjazdu Historyków Polskich we Wrocławiu 19–22 września 1948*. Warszawa 1948. Vol. 2(1); B. Suchodolski: O nowy typ historii wychowania. *Nowa Szkoła* 1948, no. 4; S. Sztobryn: *Polskie badania nad myślą pedagogiczną w latach 1900–1939. Parerga*. Ed. S. Sztobryn. Gdańsk 2006; S. Sztobryn: *Historia wychowania*. In *Pedagogika*. Ed. B. Śliwerski. Vol. 1. Gdańsk 2006; Ł. Michalski: *Dzieje odzyskane. O bliskich nowoczesnej pedagogice metodologiach historii*. In *Interdyscyplinarność i transdyscyplinarność pedagogiki — wymiary teoretyczny i praktyczny*. Eds. R. Włodarczyk, W. Żłobicki. Kraków 2011).

though these were the times of a certain “loosening” of the iron grip of the regime, it still needs to be considered a work of a transgressive character with respect to the canons of “propriety” of that period. Perhaps one should even entertain the thought that it is precisely editorial perversity which is decisive of the standards of scientific normalcy. What also demands reflection is the fact that the authors publishing their texts in the days of socialist pedagogy all embraced the importance of a historio-pedagogical narration, regardless of their differences. Upon reading the works of socialist pedagogues disqualified by the present one cannot but be under the impression that their authors, though representing different methodological approaches, all valued historical reflection in educational sciences,³ a thing so critically missing from today’s pedagogy.

Yet let us return to the said Introduction where Bogdan Suchodolski sketches an approach to past pedagogical realities “in general” while scrutinizing Rowid’s work: “the historical necessity of analyzing educational issues from the perspective of grand historical transformations that have changed the conditions of educational work and its tasks is not a thing of the past” and he continues to argue: “one would be mistaken to believe that revision and critique must be all-encompassing and lead us to reject the heritage of the past as a whole” (p. IX). Suchodolski envisions the presence of Rowid’s work in the collective pedagogical consciousness under certain conditions: “By publicizing Rowid’s work that presents the rules and ways of actualizing the idea of a ‘creative school’ we need to have particular clarity and understanding of the contemporary conditions of educational work in Poland, the crucial and most urgent tasks of this line of work in order to be able to assess the issue correctly. At the same time, we need to realize the scientific progress that has recently taken place and the elementary contrasts between certain theories that have until recently prevailed, and thus to grasp what concepts of the human being result from the experiences of our epoch and what appears to be a right step forward” (pp. IX–X).

If one were to make a summary of the statements above then the points of greatest importance would be: an insistence on the constant necessity of historical analyses of the educational field, the continuity of pedagogical theories therefore facilitated by annexing the “heritage of the past” and a well-understood actuality which performs the “working through” of the present and projects the future diachronically, and one not blind to past contexts. What is more, Suchodolski encourages us to ceaselessly test the limits of what is considered wrong and inassimilable, what is off limits with

³ This thesis is not an attempt to rehabilitate historical materialism; on this level of reflection, there is a difference between pointing to the appreciation of a diachronic perspective therein, which is a *conditio sine qua non* for the humanistic perspective, and choosing to employ it.

respect to the *household*. Sergey Hessen (1997), in an exquisite summary of his analyses of Rousseau and Tolstoy, has made verbal this historiographic strategy (resulting from the continuity of pedagogical ideas) of never losing sight of the margins of theory (*waste*) and its disqualified forms (*trash*): “The ideal of autonomous education is indestructible in its critical part, its core that nurtures pedagogy and its perpetual ability to renew itself. We began with presenting this ideal not for the criticism that is always easy but because we believe we need to move beyond this ideal. A pedagogue who has not succumbed to its allure, but is eager to point out all of its flaws without first thinking it through is an unfit pedagogue” (p. 99).

The historio-theoretical tropes

The problematic nature of building the theory of historiography and the very nature of the view its perspective enables, demands an interdisciplinary approach — not shy to draw from disciplines not traditionally related to pedagogy but rather to philosophy, literary theory or historiographic theory (which, in fact, is a theory of history in general). The advantage of such an approach is the possibility to construct one’s analyses around a first-hand *cautious* reflection which enables one to draw from the sources of theory (which the tradition of historical research would suggest anyway, regardless of the paradigm of one’s choice). On the other hand, looking at the past meanders of historiography — particularly where it resigned from a positivist approach to historical writing — one can even clearly distinguish concepts very close to pedagogical sensibility which therefore dictate the very way of narrating or applying the history of education. What seems of utmost importance is, above all, the “nonclassical” approaches for which the anti-positivist shift has been crucial, though still not worked through in the field of sciences on education. Let us quote from Friedrich Nietzsche (1967) as one of the forerunners of this shift in paradigm: “Against positivism which halts at phenomena — ‘there are only facts’ — I would say: No, facts are precisely what there is not, only interpretations. We cannot establish any fact, ‘in itself’: perhaps it is folly to want to do such a thing” (§ 481). Nietzsche thus exposes the belief in an unengaged approach to the object of narration; by the same token the element of narration dismisses the mechanistic image of a human being. One could consider *Annales* — the interwar French school of historians, who also leaned towards a more “human” socio-economical perspective at the expense of the traditional political narration, as the aftermath of this paradigmatic shift. As a consequence, the development of

an “ordinary” individual (not necessarily historically important) became the center of attention and the perspective focused on studying everyday life.

As Marxist historiography, which in itself can clearly be considered as a departure from the positivist paradigm, was very pregnant with consequences for Polish historiography, it therefore deserves a separate discussion. Georg C. Iggers (1997) emphasizes that “the contribution of Marxism to modern historical science must not be underestimated. Without Marx a good deal of the body of modern social science theory, which defined itself in opposition to Marx, along with the work of Max Weber, would not be thinkable” (pp. 78–79). It is, after all Marxism which rejects the idea of the “neutrality” of historiographic narration, a claim that can be supported by citing from any textbook for the history of education written in the spirit of historical materialism: “Striving to, above all, present the progressive educational achievements and tendencies we would oft have to resign from presenting scientifically interesting topics, frequently even the current ones, if they stood in the way of the development of education and were detrimental to the project of popularizing knowledge” (Kurdybacha, 1965, p. 8). Still, as even Iggers (1997) acknowledges: “Marx’s own doctrine is full of ambivalences and ambiguities. Marx was a dogmatic but by no means a very systematic or consistent thinker. He thus operated with two quite different conceptions of science that neither he nor his followers were able to reconcile. [...] On the one hand, the dialectic repudiates the positivistic notion of the primacy of the phenomenal world for science, because it holds that all visible manifestations are problematic and must be understood within the broader context of conflicting forces [...]. But on the other hand, Marx merges his critique of positivism with an essentially positivistic conception of a law-governed process in which the dialectic takes a materialist form leading to the fulfillment of history in a communist society” (pp. 79–80). This largely undermines the rightfulness of generalizations regarding the methodological orientation of, for instance, historiographic studies written back in the day when socialist pedagogy was predominant as well as announces their positivist inclination.

Finally, to think of the field of the historiographic contexts of Michel Foucault’s oeuvre (as he researched into the key categories crucial for pedagogical optics such as power/knowledge in relation to discourse and put forward a method of studying the history of institutions) or call upon such thinkers as Dominick LaCapra, Frank Ankersmit, or Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht who developed the vision of history described by Krzysztof Maliszewski (2007) as “a space of ethical sensibility is to draw from a resource of matters nearly identical to those of pedagogical thought” (cf. Michalski). What is at stake here is the capaciousness and subtlety (nuances) of new pedagogical constructs.

Conclusion

Sławomir Mrożek's (2010) observation that practically anything can be made the *spiritus movens* of history (p. 27) even nose-picking seems to be ominously true. As a response to the anxiety such a reflection might provoke one could envision responsibility that bothers to reflect on what might have moved the wheel of history at a particular time; one could sketch a program for ethics that does not tire to draw from the greatest variety of historical visions possible, a kind close to Rorty's ethics of sensitivity (2002, no. 1–2, pp. 73–74). After all, we should mind whether nose-picking actually is the *spiritus movens* of history or might become one if some group of people usurps the right to destroy another or to raise a thoughtless kind of human beings.

The scantiness of Polish ways of thinking on the history of education, and the lack of variety therein perpetuates virtual inertia rather than stimulates a productive ferment of visions and revisions. It has now been four decades since the first edition of a work groundbreaking to historiographic thinking — Hayden White's *Metahistory* (1973) which has been a time for many a heated historiosophical and historiographic debate. Meanwhile, the pedagogical counterparts of such a reflection have until recently been practically absent. Whether this is due to the political demands in the times of the People's Republic or because of the discipline's lack of autonomy⁴ or for whichever other reasons, the postwar historiography of education has been highly homogenous methodologically. In the context of the current state of reflection on the history of education it appears that pedagogy has not yet learned from the essential issues from the theory of history and historiography as well as from the broadly defined 'humanities' of the past century. In effect many share a sense of a bad presence of history in pedagogical thinking — somewhere between unconscious lack and, on which Lech Witkowski has also reflected, a wrong, "formal" (mis)use of history. Merely quoting some of the great pedagogues does not necessarily entail a genuine discovery of the value of their work and its personal appreciation. There is ample evidence to believe that such references often serve as a precaution against potential criticism from which some monumental authority is to shield the one who grabs it. Those guilty of such abuses of the symbolic capital often go scot free not only because the ones abused are no longer there to protest. If Suchodolski, Hessen, Trentowski, or Nawroczyński happen to be invoked

⁴ This lack of autonomy might result from the parcelling out of the history of education. Bogdan Suchodolski effectively promoted the segmentation of the field into separate domains to be studied by historians, pedagogues, and cultural researchers in his early writings.

by the bombastic rhetoric of various works and dissertations, book introductions or conference speeches and become yoked together to one spot of the factual axis just for the esthetic illusion of a historical continuity, then not only a great intellectual capital that could enrich our contemporary thinking is wasted but also, by narrowing our contemporary perspective on the past of education, we are sentencing the greatest achievements of educational thought to extinction.

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Łukasz Michalski

Économie de l'histoire de l'éducation, ou à la recherche d'une bonne présence de l'histoire dans la pensée pédagogique

Résumé

Le présent texte n'est qu'une partie des recherches essayant de profiter de toutes les « occasions de lecture » qui conduiront au voisinage des réponses à la question sur les relations de l'histoire des changements dans les sciences humaines générales du XX^e siècle et sur l'évolution de l'historiographie de l'éducation. La notion éponyme d'économie se réfère ici à son sens source. Pour les Anciens, *oikonomos* désignait le droit selon lequel on gérait la demeure, donc il décidait ce qui pouvait se trouver à l'intérieur de la maison et ce qu'il fallait en rejeter. Dans ce contexte apparaît la question concernant le caractère de la présence de l'histoire dans la réflexion sur l'éducation et celle concernant les règles selon lesquelles certains fragments du passé sont introduits dans la réflexion pédagogique et d'autres sont disqualifiés.

Łukasz Michalski

Ekonomia dziejów wychowania, czyli w poszukiwaniu dobrej obecności historii w myśleniu pedagogicznym

Streszczenie

Niniejszy tekst jest jedynie częścią poszukiwań starających się wykorzystać wszelkie lekturowe „okazje”, które powiodą w pobliżu odpowiedzi na pytanie o relacje historii XX-wiecznych przemian ogólnohumanistycznych i dziejów historiografii wychowania. Tytułowa ekonomia odnosi się tutaj do swego źródłowego sensu. *Oikonomos* oznaczało dla starożytnych prawo, wedle którego zarządza się domostwem, zatem osądza o tym, co w obrębie domu może się znaleźć, a co winno być z niego wyrzucone. W tym kontekście pojawia się zatem pytanie o charakter obecności historii w namyśle nad wychowaniem oraz o zasady, wedle których jedne fragmenty przeszłości zostają włączone w namysł pedagogiczny, a inne ulegają dyskwalifikacji.